

A FOOL'S ERRAND

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MRS. VICTOR RICKARD

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ROADS
THE FRANTIC BOAST
THE FIRE OF GREEN BOUGHS
THE HOUSE OF COURAGE
CATHY ROSSITER
A RECKLESS PURITAN
THE STORY OF THE MUNSTERS

A FOOL'S ERRAND

By

MRS. VICTOR RICKARD



*HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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QUENTIN DILLON was back in London again, suffering from a sense of general flatness. There seemed to be no more ups and downs or tremendous moments left in life. The waves of war had receded, and the feverish exaltations, the queerly inconsequent intricacies, and all the horror, as well as much of the zest of the past, had vanished quietly and was no longer there.

If fête days "ask for to-morrow," it is also true that misery, and the terrible intoxication of a long ordeal, makes its demand for something further, to stir the soul. Though he had once longed for a renewal of the old order of things, he did not know then that change had touched him with a strong, formative hand, and a gap wider than years alone separated the old Quentin Dillon from the man who stared out of the window of his club in Pall Mall.

In some respects the war had treated him kindly, and his unusually striking good looks had been reinforced by a much greater power and definiteness than had formerly been his. His thick dark hair was slightly streaked with grey, though he was little more than thirty, and his sensitive face and dark, audacious eyes had a hint of past suffering even in their defiant mirth.

His slim figure, narrow-hipped and slender at the waist, was essentially graceful, and he held himself with the energy and happy eagerness of one who is very much at home in the world.

As he stood, looking out at the traffic of the street below, he was debating a question in his mind with a touch of real amusement.

Like all other human beings, whichever their sex, who have strong personalities, Quentin was capable of making many enemies for himself. He had a quick temper which clothed itself in a smile, and was therefore doubly irritating to his foes, and he was usually successful. Success brings jealousy in its train, and Quentin accepted his laurels carelessly and wore them without any seriousness of manner. He was a law unto himself, and as the world is composed chiefly of people who desire to make laws for the rest of us, the law-givers regarded him as a rebel.

It must not be concluded from this that Quentin had a score of crimes to his record, or that he defied decency and order ; he merely refused to bow to central authority only when it did not impress him sufficiently. He went his way carelessly and said what he thought and did pretty much as he pleased, and there were very few who had, so to speak, called him out, and challenged him to single combat. Over and over again he had been badly reported upon by his seniors, and again and again he had fought his reports and scored a success, because in the fortunes of war his virtues had

been those of the necessary kind. But dash and a defiant gallantry under exceptional conditions no longer carried weight, and having affronted more than one of his senior officers at a time when his characteristic audacity was of value, Quentin lived to learn that elderly gentlemen can have long memories.

Among the younger men in the regiment which he had joined in the war, Quentin was popular—with exceptions. Here again his power of creating a following had shown its disadvantages, and it is true that you may not be liked in excess of the ordinary and limited standard without being disliked by quite a lot of people of whose existence you need hardly be aware.

What set him thinking of all this, or to be exact, what made him reflect upon the fact that he had a good reckoning of detractors, was the prospect of a regimental dinner taking place that night at the Grantham Hotel. He had received the usual notification, and though he had not come to London in order to be present on the occasion, it came to his mind that he might turn up there.

He wanted to see Stephen Lorne, and Markham, and it would be sufficiently amusing to meet Wade, his late commanding officer, who had done his best to break him before the last advance, when, by a curious turn of fate, it had fallen to Quentin to take the battalion through the heaviest fighting of that year to its triumphant objective, Wade having broken himself

temporarily through over-much recourse to the courage he found in a brandy bottle. In Wade's case the break had been capable of repair, and he received all the necessary decorations to cover the cracks.

There was not a hint of personal rancour in his mind as he thought of the past. Take it all round, there had been ample good fellowship and a fine *camaraderie* to give life a swing, and if some fellows were better than other fellows, the majority were altogether good. As for his own part in it all, he hardly threw it a thought. Anything he had done had been done in the way of duty, and the things he hadn't done were numerous enough according to his reports. He was careless, lacked a sense of discipline, and had no head for detail. In fact, in the eyes of Colonel Wade his only virtue was that he "presented a smart appearance and rode well." His eyes laughed as he thought of it.

He was out of the army now, and they might say or think what they pleased, but the old friends would remain, and he wanted to see Lorne and Markham.

For the rest of it, there was always a tumultuous richness about life, and Quentin had a happy, unperplexed outlook towards the future. He was sufficiently well off to be independent, and just now he was at a kind of pause, before a new beginning. What it would be he did not yet know, but whatever it was he felt that he must grow interested, and he realised that there is significance in what

seem to be the accidental combinations of the careless events of life.

As he went out of the club, telling himself again that he hated London, he decided to spend an hour looking at some paintings in a small gallery off Trafalgar Square, and, making his way there, he walked round the room slowly searching for a picture of a garden, which he wanted to buy and send to his mother.

The gallery proved a little disappointing. It showed him angels in moon-rainbows, soldiers in tin helmets, and women, whom he was glad to think he did not know nor have to meet, they looked so nervy and fantastic ; but there were no gardens. At length Quentin sat down on a velvet sofa, hopelessly tired, after the way of people who really know nothing about pictures and who yet go to look at them, and he turned a jaded attention towards the other human beings who made up the crowd.

They were not attractive. It is nearly impossible for any crowd of people to be charming in the mass, and many of them looked very nearly as bored as Quentin felt himself to be. Just before he got up to leave in utter despair, he saw one face which rewarded him for having come there at all.

The girl who attracted his attention was not in the least well dressed, and she was of a distinct and unusual type, her features attractively irregular, and her deep grey eyes just a little wistful. Her hair was fair, of the clear gold fairness which goes with a pale complexion,

and among so many faces, vacant or wearing masks, hers was intrinsically real. She was being, in fact, herself, and she was quite alone. No elderly lady followed her, and no strangely-dressed young man talked art to her with the air of a critic. She was not one of a bunch, and so much did she impress Quentin with the solitariness of her individuality that she stood out like a beacon on a dark hill. Her clothes were very simple, and he guessed that she was probably poor, or at least that she couldn't afford the fashionable garments worn by some of the others.

He longed to ask her what she thought of it all. Not what she thought of the paintings, which mattered very little, he felt, but of the men and women ; what she thought of life and things in general, and whether she always went along, looking steadily around her with the wisdom of a grey-eyed Athene. She did think. You could tell that much, having seen her at all, and she was graceful and held herself well.

It was unusual for Quentin to occupy his mind with women. He could have counted for you on the fingers of one hand how many he had ever been in the habit of giving any place in his thoughts. There was his mother and her sunny garden ; there was his Aunt Alice, who had a moustache and whom he regarded as the best rider to hounds he knew, in spite of her advancing years. There was Cassandra Austen, his cousin, known as Sandra, who was supposed by family tradition to be his future

wife, and there had been Dolly Bernard. . . . Dolly Bernard had been a mistake.

It was stupid actually to see a girl who looked exactly the person you might talk to for any length of time, yet because of the conventions, to be forced to let her drift out of reach, and Quentin wondered whether, in such a case, one acted upon impulse. He decided that perhaps it was better not to do this, and having hesitated, the opportunity was irrevocably lost, for the girl went through the door and out of the gallery, leaving nothing of herself behind except that queer, fluid impression which may subsequently mean either so much, or nothing whatever, because we remember very little of faces just seen, however beautiful, when they have drifted out on the tides of life.

The remainder of the day passed in a kaleidoscopic jumble, as days without any very definite event get themselves through in London, and Quentin found himself thinking again and again of the girl who had stirred him so unexpectedly. It was not her beauty, for she was less beautiful, strictly speaking, than a number of the other women he had watched without enthusiasm, but it was rather some special quality she possessed, and for the life of him he could not define it in words. The whole soul of her was in her expression and the grace of her carriage. He felt himself to be in the same mood with the poet who wrote of "lady, sweet and kind—was never face so

pleased my mind," who passed him by, and left him loving her.

He laughed at himself, and thought of Sandra Austen. Sandra was indicated by the steady pointing of the family finger, and she was his cousin. She was dark, clever and marvellously tactful. The elders and betters of the world loved her, and Quentin liked her very much, but never, never in all the years they had been friends, had he experienced a single thrill caused by the touch of her hand or the sound of her charming voice.

And yet, marriage . . . ? You would always know where you were with Sandra. . . . He grew vague and restless as he put on his mess uniform and frowned at his own dark face in the glass. It wasn't sensible to think of a girl whom you had seen once and once only, and at last he fell back on the consolation that Sandra might not really care for him in the way of love. The gentle pressure of family influence was constantly pushing them towards one another, and there were the memories into the bargain. He forgot all about both women by the time he arrived at the Grantham Hotel, and found that as usual he was after time. Punctuality was one of the things he had never learnt.

Quentin Dillon was accustomed to popularity, and when he went into the room, which was crowded with men, he was at once aware of the queer electric forces that warn the sensitive mind of hostility, and he immediately collected

himself for battle. One glance around the room told him that his best allies were absent. Lorne and Markham were not there, and the predominance of power was all on the side of Wade, his late commanding officer, who only gave him the most cursory acknowledgment. There were a number of elderly officers, dating from the ancient past, to whom Wade had kow-towed as a subaltern and of whom Dillon knew next to nothing, and there were half a dozen younger men who owed Quentin a grudge or two. With these there was also Vivian Young, who had been his friend, but who now met him with a considerable lowering of the usual temperature, and the stiffness of a corpse was about the manner of Goldstein, who walked into the dining-room beside Quentin when dinner was announced, and he found himself seated between him and Young.

Had he been the devil arriving at a Sunday-school treat he could not have felt himself a more ill-timed guest. His eyes grew bright, and when he spoke to Young his manner was dangerously polite. They were his enemies, and Young, for all his good qualities, was also a social barometer. If you were doing well he was friendly and even gushing, but if the wind set against you, Vivian became illusive and declined to commit himself, and it was very evident that Dillon was not a popular figure that night.

The dinner wore on as such entertainments do, and the collection of former colonels talked

of previous times, old Standish doing his best to bring some *bonhomie* into the meeting. He even shouted in his husky voice at Quentin in his effort at producing a kindly atmosphere, but Wade, at the head of the table, did not intend that he should achieve any success. At the conclusion of dinner the moment came for speeches, and Wade stood up. He was a short, ineffective little man with indefinite features and the rather slovenly appearance of an elderly, self-indulgent field officer, but he spoke well and expressed himself in carefully arranged words which had taken him a good deal of preparation.

All down the long table the faces of the guests were turned towards him, and Quentin watched him with his blazing dark eyes full of secret amusement. Wade's shortcomings had been so carefully glazed over that it appeared as though he must have quite forgotten them himself.

There was a good deal to be said, and the names of one after another of the regiment who had distinguished themselves and died in the doing, were followed by the names of others who were still alive, and some of them present, and the cheering after each name was continuous and brought a thrill of the old glory back to the heart. Wade came to the most recent of the actions in which the regiment had distinguished itself, and an uneasy feeling took hold upon Quentin. His own part had been dramatic enough to call for a strong personal

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action itself, for much of it could not be spoken of without mention of Dillon's part in leading the battalion. The smallness of a mean personal dislike coupled with envy had conquered with wonderful completeness, and Wade had his allies and backers.

It was the finest thing Quentin had ever done or was likely to do, and now it had been mauled and ill-handled by the little souls, and as he sat there outwardly unconcerned and indifferent, he felt an inward sinking of his heart.

Why should he mind? These things don't matter. Wade talking like a hack journalist, with his studied phrases, when he had eaten a good dinner and there were no bombs falling in the neighbourhood, was enough to make angels laugh or weep—whichever way it takes an angel when he witnesses such sights. Young, crowned with Dillon's laurels, and all these pompous old men, each with something to say, duller than the last. Yet he had known the real satisfaction of having carried through his work with perfection, he was sure of that.

Yet one couldn't escape unscathed. That was the only thing which mattered. Wade was pulling at his moustache and looking pleased. After a long time he had settled a score to his own satisfaction, and the joy of the ungenerous man was his. He felt that he had let Quentin down quite publicly, and Quentin remembered with a touch of rather cynical mirth, that when it lay in his hands to have thrown Wade to the dogs, he had refrained.

The war was over then, and Wade couldn't very well mess things up in any future actions.

No, it didn't matter what they did to him. Carruthers who had fought beside him was dead, and most of the best fellows were dead. The survivors . . . it made Dillon want to laugh once more, as he considered them.

Kemp was on his legs now, barking like an angry terrier about some grievance of his own. He was always angry with every one and had a bad word for every one, whether he called him friend or foe, so it didn't much matter which you were. For a moment Dillon was consciously helpless, and again he stood away from his personal point of view with an effort.

As the night wore on and the dinner came to its end, Quentin decided that so far as he was concerned the situation had taught him a lesson. He had been at a loose end and was anxious to find something new to do, and the regimental dinner made him realise that he wanted more than that. He wanted to forget all about them—you couldn't fight Wade and his fellows, and if you allowed yourself to be angry with them, it only meant that you acknowledged that they had enough power to irritate. He might let Wade affect him like a mosquito bite, but that was ridiculous. Wade's own resentment against Dillon was active enough to be as unpleasant for himself as an attack of smallpox, and as they walked out of the dining-room it was certainly true that Dillon's tall figure and easy air of perfect

nonchalance made the contrast between them cruelly striking. Nature was on the side of Quentin, and she seemed to be proclaiming the fact as he stood in the centre of the room talking to a group of men who were uneasily aware that something rather ill-bred and unsporting had been done under their very noses.

Even if they did not altogether approve of Dillon, they admitted his power, and no one was quite sure what to do next. Ought they to speak to him, and say that they felt the affront, or should they ignore it? The line Wade had taken put them in a difficulty.

"I think you should have been named, Dillon," old Colonel Grant said kindly, for he was the most well-intentioned of men. "All our gallant fellows. . . ."

"Surely not, sir," Quentin laughed. "There wasn't time for giving special pats on the head to so many of us. I did nothing!"

Fisher, who had been on the staff, and was one constellation of decorations, wandered up and joined them, "I thought you'd done something special," he said wearily. "Oh, well, I suppose there were so many recommendations. . . ."

"I expect so." Dillon turned away. Some one wanted him to play bridge.

Even then he could not entirely quench the sharp little flame of vexation. Young was waiting about near Wade like a well-trained dog, wagging his tail and jumping up to be patted; Young, who had received a sharp

dose of truth from Quentin when for one fatal moment his nerves had broken.

It was all over now. The weary old war was over, and what you had done or failed to do was forgotten. The world had swept on over the graves and the scars, and they were doing their best to get back into grooves and grow a nice fresh crop of small hates and personal rancours, the seeds of which had been carefully gathered and preserved. Let them. It was the last time Quentin intended to permit them the chance of ever ruffling the surface of his mind.

"The former things had passed away," it was true, and in the blank which followed nothing new had yet come to take their place.

Let the door close finally and shut them out from each other. He had no further part with them, and never had really belonged to the old school. They wanted to get everything back to a place they described as "the old footing," and even had they wished him to join them there, Dillon knew it to be no place for the likes of him.

He left with a sense of relief. It was so well to be done with them, when you looked at it squarely. Lorne and Markham were of a different kind, and those others who would never come back again. These wanted their world. Let them have it ; and what a blessing to be able to say of them that one need never stifle yawns in their company again, or listen to the latest misdeeds of this one or that.

He left them gladly, unconscious for his part that he was to be turned into a kind of legend of darkness, a battle ground where subsequently one or two upheld him, and a lingering and even attractive memory to those very few who had really known and cared for him. He had been angry with them, but it was not Dillon's way to remain angry. He only laughed and went on to the next stage, because fate had blessed him in that he was one of those for whom there is always a next stage.

SANDRA AUSTEN lived with her father, a retired general, in a house on the Surrey Downs, about an hour's run from London. Suburbs had encroached around it, reaching out red bricks and stucco fingers to grasp the chalky white and willow green of the country, but Foxhurst had retained its own isolation in spite of this. It stood away from the roads that hummed with motor traffic, and General Austen had refused all offers to buy the patch of wild wood at the back and the stretch of gorse-grown upland beyond, so Sandra maintained that they still lived in the country.

It was a pleasant house to go to, and Quentin felt a fresh warmth of satisfaction as he walked up the steep hill and through the avenue gate, between rhododendron borders in full blossom. Sandra had a way of softening the hard edges of life and putting you on good terms with yourself, so that a visit to her always held much consolation, and he had awakened to a fresh feeling of annoyance when he remembered the occurrence of the evening before. He had passed through a mental crisis which marked a parting of the ways, and in retrospect he wondered why he had not said something very telling, or scored on Wade before he left the Grantham Hotel.

The brightness of the day and the singing of many birds aroused him from angry meditations, and he walked through the house without ringing, and on to the green lawn outside the drawing-room windows. General Austen was likely to be out, and Quentin sincerely hoped that he might be. He was a fussy, well preserved old gentleman, who had, in former times, driven his staff frantic, and who now concentrated upon keeping his figure and attending vestry meetings. He looked like an aristocratic dancing master, and he was, Dillon thought, the most complete bore in England. Still, it occupied him to hunt the Vicar on his bicycle, and he sat on various committees and wasted time in a number of busy ways.

Sandra was in the garden planting out little seedlings from a box in a shady corner, and she looked up under a rush hat, her face full of greeting and her strong, white teeth showing in a gay smile of welcome. She pulled off her leather gloves and held out her hand to her cousin, her narrow, clever eyes watching him steadily. It occurred to her at once that Quentin had a "black dog" on his shoulder, and she wondered what the cause of it might be. He seemed always to drown people with the tremendous depth of his own glance, and she swam into it for a second and then looked at the twist of his mouth.

"Shall we go into the wood?" she asked, "or shall we have the deck chairs out on to the lawn?"

"The wood," he said, as they turned up the narrow path to where a sheet of bluebells painted the whole undergrowth below the shining of the spring-clothed trees. "I've come here to be smoothed down, Sandra. My self-contentment has been tampered with and it must be put in order again."

"Who has been throwing stones at you?" she asked, as they came to a broader path which led to the edge of the little wood, where a gate and a white painted seat separated them from the common. Having reached it she sat down, prepared to listen, and Quentin flung himself on the grass at her feet.

"A silly old man, called Wade, of whom I have the very lowest opinion," Dillon said, lighting a cigarette. "It's funny, isn't it, Sand, that even if one doesn't like people oneself, one is illogical enough to resent it if they don't like you?"

"Colonel Wade was commanding your battalion."

"So it is said," Quentin laughed. "But I mustn't be ill-natured. Anyhow, I went to the regimental dinner last night, and it was made plain to me that I was a wash-out. I'll be quite honest over this. I know that I'd done pretty well in that last show, and though I don't care a kick about ribbons and mentions I would have appreciated a kind word."

"They never did like you much, Quentin," she said reflectively. "You're not in the least the kind of man whom people *like*, exactly.

They either go to greater lengths, or they hate the sight of you."

"I don't mind," he closed his eyes lazily. "It's all over now. What I want to do is to find something else to amuse myself with. I'm waiting for a revelation."

Sandra smiled at his long graceful figure. She had cared so much for him for years that it was strange to think that she could care any more, and yet just then she felt that she did.

"Anything else?" she asked.

Dillon sat up quickly. "Why, yes," he said. "I believe I've fallen in love. Here's romance for you, Sandra. I went to a picture gallery, and I saw a girl there who is like. . . . Now, what is she like?"

"Yes?" Sandra's voice was perfectly steady, and though her hands were clasped very tightly round her knees she did not alter her position.

"She had a straight nose and rather a crooked mouth, and was pale and very fair like *la belle dame*, only I am sure she was merciful. She was looking at the pictures in the gallery, and I don't believe she liked them any better than I did."

"And did you pick up her catalogue and that sort of thing?" Sandra asked.

"No. I did nothing yesterday. It was a bad day. In the end she 'went her unremembering way,' and I shall never see her any more."

The words were light enough as he spoke them, but there was a look in his eyes which

contradicted what he said. As Sandra made no reply, he talked on. "I wonder why I tell you all this. Do you know what I was thinking of doing when I came down here?"

"How could anyone know?" she asked. "My dear Quentin, don't expect the impossible."

"I wondered—and I came to ask you to tell me—whether A and B, who have been friends for years and know all each other's faults—no, I don't think that's the way to put it. I mean, A is faultless and B isn't, but they both know all this quite well; would it be wise if they—" He leaned his chin on his hands and looked up at her. "You wouldn't think of marrying me, would you, Sandra?"

The face under the rush hat grew very pale, and Cassandra Austen shivered a little, though the day was gloriously warm and bright. She glanced down at his face and studied it for a second.

"No," she said, shaking her small, well-shaped head. "I wouldn't do that, Quentin."

"I wonder why. Is it because you don't think of me that way?"

"Oh, I can't explain." She bent forward and a slight flush touched her pallor. "Perhaps I want something more romantic. It would be very righteous and dull and respectable, wouldn't it? You aren't the only living romanticist."

"I know we aren't in love in the accepted sense," he went on, frowning slightly, "but there's a great deal besides that, Sand, and

there's no one else I ever shall feel the same towards in heaps of ways. It's different for you, I can see that, and I put it as a proposition, with all the advantages on my own side."

Sandra got up quickly. "I once made a vow," she said, as they walked on towards the strip of common which blazed golden under the midday sun, "that nothing that might happen should ever disturb our friendship. Marriage under such conditions would ruin it."

Dillon's thoughts transported him for a second into the picture gallery again. He returned to the moment when he saw the face of the "lady sweet and kind," and though he mocked at himself for his very boyishness, he wondered whether Sandra was right in saying that friendship was no true basis for marriage.

"You spoke just now," Sandra went on, "of some one you had seen only yesterday, and though you pretended it was a joke, I know you so well that I can guess that rather more of you than your thoughts ran after her. That kind of thing wouldn't do."

"She may have a dozen husbands already, and in any case I shall never see her again. Don't be silly, Sand." He took her elbow as he walked beside her. "I'm doing this all wrong. I'm certain that I ought not to argue with you. I ought to talk to you of love. This vow of yours——"

"Means a great deal to me," she interrupted him quickly. "You are trying to persuade yourself—and me," she added, after a hardly

perceptible pause, "to accept the substance for the shadow, and shadows are all that really matter, if you understand life."

"You can't care about it. You won't risk it?" He looked at her earnestly. She was very dear to him, and in this pause where he stood he had sincerely hoped that she might find it in her heart to care. But he was almost certain she did not love him, and he could not find a single argument to persuade her against her will. What he had to offer was too lame and devoid of real passion to make him urgent.

"You aren't thinking of Dolly?" he asked impulsively. "That's done and finished with."

"I wasn't thinking of Dolly. I was thinking of myself."

She had gone a little in advance of him and stood on a rise of ground against the aching blue of a sky where great clouds sailed past. In Dillon's eyes she seemed wonderfully free, with the freedom of complete escape from circumstances, standing away above him on her upland, with her eyes raised to the sky.

"Tell me more about last night," she said quietly. "You were hurt rather badly, weren't you?"

"Come now, Sand," he said, catching her waist, "that isn't fair. You think I am out for consolation."

"And if I do, I'm not so very far wrong," she smiled. "It isn't decreed that you and I shall watch each other grow elderly and fat, or elderly and thin." She put her hand on his

arm. "Now swear to me that, whatever happens, we shall always be friends, always." She spoke with great earnestness and Quentin held her hand in his and swore, and she seemed satisfied, for she lost a little of the strained look around her mouth, and they talked of other things as they walked back to the house together.

General Austen required the whole conversation to himself during luncheon. He had been as busy as usual and was drafting a letter to the Home Secretary, who must have become well used to his awful lucidity, which covered pages, and was divided into sections. He had taken it for granted for some years that Cassandra would marry Quentin, and after he had dragged his unwilling nephew to his sanctum and talked statistics to him for half an hour, standing on the hearth-rug and glancing at his own reflection in a mirror opposite, he felt his carefully-trained moustache and remarked suddenly that he hoped that Quentin hadn't come there to expedite matters.

"I can't really get on without Sandra at present," he said fretfully, his hands feeling the line of his waist. "I don't know how I should replace her."

Quentin looked up. "So far as I am concerned," he said, "there's no question of my disarranging your plans, Uncle Arthur. Sandra has refused to marry me."

General Austen started dramatically. "Refused you? My dear boy—I hardly know

what to say. You see, it's been taken for granted more or less——”

“ It doesn't do to take anything for granted, especially if it's Sandra,” Dillon said slowly. “ That is, I think, where we all made a mistake.”

General Austen made a tour of the room, humming to himself abstractedly, and ejaculating “ Well ! ” “ Who would have thou——” “ This is surpris——” Eventually he came to a halt before Quentin. “ Did she give you any reason ? ”

“ Only that she didn't want to marry me.”

“ I thought I understood women,” the General said in a voice of some alarm, “ but this—why, it shows me that I have made a mistake.” The idea of ever having made a mistake was so foreign and at the same time so unpleasant to his mind that he looked quite ill.

The room was on the north side of the house, and there was a cold, greenish light in it which made General Austen look far less youthful than he usually did, and he grasped his letter to the Home Secretary in his hand. It did not occur to him to ask Quentin what his own feelings were, for he was not an object for philanthropy, and as for Sandra, the idea of a vague and nearly eternal engagement was exactly what he approved of. Every one of the family had said it was “ suitable,” and now all the carefully-built structure was tumbling around his ears.

“ What do you intend to do ? ” he asked, still obviously upset and irritated.

"I am going down to Dawn to-morrow, and after that—well, I hardly have any plans."

Quentin left Foxhurst by a late afternoon train, when the sunlight was painting crimson splashes on walls and houses and giving the trees a deep, strong note of beautiful colour. Sandra came to see him off, and up to the moment when she stood on the platform, waving her hand to him in farewell, she was cheerful, and just as he had always known her. It was only when he had gone, and the last wisp of sunlit smoke from the train vanished like a wraith in the evening air, that her face grew pinched and sad, and her eyes clouded with pent-up misery.

"It wouldn't have been any use," she said to herself over and over again, for she knew, out of her own wisdom, the truth which lies behind the words, "From him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

"I don't think that Bretherton's cutter is what he used to be," her father said petulantly as he joined her in the drawing-room before dinner. "This coat doesn't sit as well as the last I had from him. I shall warn him that if he can't do better I must change my tailor."

She patted and smoothed the offending wrinkle, more as though he was a little boy than an old man who refused to grow any older, and in the end she pacified him, and he stiffened his shoulders and held himself very erect. And then Sandra wondered whether anything would ever matter very much to her again, for it is

hard indeed to have the heart's desire offered to the longing heart, and to see the wisdom of refusal. Almost the only cynical mercy left in the whole matter was the ridiculous fact that Quentin never guessed that she had deliberately broken her own heart.

* * * * *

Quentin went back to London quite uncomforted. He was human enough to add Sandra's gentle refusal of his half-hearted suggestion to the pile of failures which he was collecting. She had stuck to friendship, but for the moment friendship seemed abominably cold and comfortless. He had offered her the very thing no woman with a spark of reality in her would be expected to accept, and yet he would have made her happy—or so he tried to think. Restlessness had driven him to grasp at the calm which was Sandra's finest quality, and he had come to her like a hungry beggar to plead for "alms for oblivion." He hated himself as he thought of it. He wanted to forget so much. There had been too much of fierce life thrust into a limited time, and now there was far too little. He couldn't find solace in racing or taking up the dropped threads, and he admitted to himself that he had tried to throw Sandra into the gap, and she had very properly refused. He made up his mind to go down to Dawn to see his mother before he allowed himself to gamble with other people's lives again.

* * * * *

The next day found him by evening in the house which he had known since he was a little boy. Dawn stood on the summit of Sleepers Hill, outside Grantchester, and below it there spread a wide view of wooded valley and the distant, shining horizon of the sea. The gardens which enclosed the house were exquisitely beautiful, and Ruskin's theory that flowers only flourish rightly in the garden of some one who loves them, was manifested in the wonderful glory of colour and scent which rioted everywhere on the terraces and in deep borders, and in the clinging mantles of blossom and honey perfume that clothed the soft red brick walls of Dawn, to the eaves of the house. Jeanne Austen, Quentin's mother, was French, and for all her years in England she had never belonged in any real sense to the country of her adoption.

She was sitting in the garden when Quentin joined her, and he wondered again at her look of unimpaired vitality and youth. Her figure showed no sign of age, and she was endowed with an eternal and upspringing courage towards life. You knew that Jeanne Austen would turn and smile at you as she stepped into the grave. Her dark eyes were very like his own, and she greeted him with outheld hands, searching his face before she kissed him, and he sat down on a white wicker chair beside her.

All her life men and women had loved his mother, and she had the half-regal touch of assurance which only belongs to women who

have been conquerors wherever they went. She even treated her son with a certain gracious coquetry which was very precious to him, as she flashed a smile at him.

"Does your Uncle Arthur still wear a silk hat on Sunday?" she said. "As a young man, he was always ridiculously well dressed."

"I am sure he does," Quentin agreed. "I wasn't there for long."

Mrs. Austen looked at the deep shadows of the purple distance. The elms at the far end of the garden were beautiful with early green, the sky behind them was the colour of a perfect turquoise, and the evening was full of pure, pale sunlight. "And Sandra, the ever excellent and admirable Sandra?"

"Sandra is very well—and very wise."

"Ah!" She glanced at him again, with the little provocative smile in her eyes. "How has she shown her wisdom in this instance?"

"By refusing to marry me." Quentin thought he might as well tell her at once and get it over. He half expected an angry outburst from his mother, who certainly rated him at something very much above his real value. "If that doesn't show how sensible she is, I don't know what would."

For a moment Mrs. Austen said nothing, and then she spoke of something quite different. "There are certain times in every life which has any incident in it," she said, with her slight French inflection more marked than usual, "when the best of us can only turn to something

outside ourselves, some take to drink, and others marry. It is when a sense of finality and the shortening of the years attacks us. I am glad that Sandra is sensible. The family wanted you to marry her, but I have never been one of the family. If you had loved her . . ." She looked at him with her bright, dark eyes, "but then you did not, and you aren't very old yet, my son."

"I don't know what I shall do," he replied ; "a gap is a bad thing. I'm not a good, plain man, mother, and just now I'm as sick as a duck in a thunderstorm. I want consolation."

Jeanne Austen shook her head and laughed. "For how long?" she asked. "You son of Eve, I don't build upon your reformation. You will go on 'climbing up the ever-climbing waves,' long after you have erected a monument to me in the church down there."

"I have no ideal, and no ideas," he said, returning her smile, "and little people can make me angry. What is to be my cure? You know so much about life that I feel sure you can tell me this."

She held his hand between her slender, well-shaped hands, and after a time she spoke again.

"I think you must go away," she said a little sadly. "Yes, Quentin, I think so. If you slide into the gap it will turn into a groove and stifle you, and if you make a bridge out of some one else's soul it will mean disaster for both of you; so you must jump over it and get to the other side."

"Where to?" he asked, without enthusiasm.

"I can't tell you that. But it's a good thing to go right away."

They talked of it again at dinner that night, by the light of the tall candles in the candelabra, and Quentin decided to make an act of faith. He would go, and the only thing which he did not tell his mother during the week he spent at Dawn was the broken episode of "the lady sweet and kind," and yet it was of her that he thought most of all as he lived there, eating out his heart in the wonderful summer days that were so cruelly barren even with all their flowering glory.

QUENTIN went back to London, still determined to go away from England, vague as to where he wished to be, but less discontented with life.

He avoided all the places which he knew, and did not go near his club. He wanted to get free from the old order of things at once, and with the idea of arriving more completely at his end, he took a room in an unsavoury looking commercial hotel near Paddington Station. His room was comfortable though dingy, and he came in rather late the first evening of his arrival and sat down at a small table in the dining-room. It was the last place where he was likely to meet anyone he had ever known before, and he had not been sitting there very long when a man came through the swing-doors and took the empty chair opposite to him.

The new-comer was an ugly-looking devil, with a blotched face, and every indication that he had been drinking, though he was not exactly drunk. His clothes were serviceable but untidy and stained, and his figure was thick-set and ungainly. Dillon guessed that he might be a commercial traveller out of a job, or some kind of commission agent, and he looked as though under favourable conditions he might be cheerful in his way.

It was impossible to probe into his past, and all you could tell was that it was probably in no cleaner or better condition than the man himself. At that moment he appeared intensely depressed and out of sorts, for he blew long sighs from between his pursed lips, and Quentin laughed inwardly, wondering whether he was in love, or what the reason of his chagrin could be.

As he considered the bulky creature, the waiter who attended at the table where they sat came up with the sprightly step of his kind, and said in welcoming accents, "Good evening, Mr. Dillon."

At the sound of his own name Quentin looked up in some surprise, and to his further astonishment, both he and the corpulent man who sat opposite replied together to the polite salutation, and then their eyes met, and Dillon laughed aloud.

"We seem to have the same name," he said in his friendly way; "rather an unusual coincidence, as the name has the virtue or the defect of being uncommon." His namesake thrust his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets and tilted back his chair, chewing a tooth-pick with an air of reflection.

"My name," he said, "Christian and sur, is William Dillon. It's a good name."

"And mine," Dillon grew more and more amused, "is Quentin Dillon." He ordered a bottle of wine. "I think that we might celebrate the meeting. It's the kind of thing that only happens once in a hundred years."

The man opposite to him gave a huge gusty laugh. His depression had been stirred and broken up for a moment, and he was enjoying the joke. "Well, brother," he said with half-insolent familiarity, "I'll drink to you. I hope you've better luck with your little lot than I've had. I was born unlucky." He grew gloomy again. "Now you give me the impression of being a man with a permanent address. Born permanent, as it were. Some are like that. It's the same with women. Some women marry and stick."

"Are you married?" Quentin asked. He was not so much interested in the past of William Dillon, as in the amusement it afforded him to make the man talk. William Dillon was a dreadful person and overflowed his outlines lamentably; he was not really clean, and there was something about him which made one doubt his honesty.

"Married? Me? Not much," he replied. "And you? Not? I thought you weren't; you haven't the look of it. Both of us gay bachelors." He wagged his head. "There's another coincidence for you."

The waiter uncorked the bottle of wine and put it on the table and slipped away again.

"I'm well known here," William Dillon went on, not without pride in the fact. "When I'm able to afford it I like style and comfort. You can get both here without ostentation. If there's any ostentation I clear out—that's what I do. None of your lordly sort for me. I like

honest comfort and a place where they give you clean sheets. You can count on that in this caboose."

"I certainly hope so," Quentin said. "Are you staying for long?"

Once more the depression of his earlier mood returned upon William Dillon, and he drank in hearty gulps before he made any answer. "Wish to God I were," he said, and he banged the table with his clenched fist. "Wish it to God, I do," and he groaned with a kind of rage. "How is it that some fellers get all the luck? I've never had a day without trouble, and it's little blame to me that I drink a glass too much now and then. I defy you to criticise me."

"I wasn't criticising you," Quentin said, stifling his desire to laugh aloud. To regard the shabby hotel as the summit of all things good was a new idea to him, and the flabby creature was really miserable, for his eyes were full of weak tears. "I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing."

"All right," William Dillon said with a hint of retort in his voice. "And as to yourself. What are you out for?"

"I was thinking of going abroad," Quentin said, filling his odd acquaintance's glass again.

"That's a wide address." Dillon the second studied him and moistened his lips. "Perhaps you're not so solvent as you look? London's full of fellers who live God knows how. *I can't do it,*" he spoke angrily. "Look here now, if I go into a shop and ask for a diamond tiara on

credit, what'd I get for my pains ? It would be, 'out you get,' and a few compliments thrown in. You would find it different."

"I haven't tried it."

"No, I didn't say you had ; but I said that if you did, you'd not have to produce your *bona fides*. It's your tailor you have to thank."

"I have to do more than thank him," Dillon said with a laugh ; "but aren't you rather glad to be settled in life?"

William Dillon nibbled at a dry biscuit. "Would you like to stand me a brandy ?" he asked. "Wine is all very well, but it's cold stuff. If I had a brandy I'd feel better."

Quentin agreed cheerfully. He had nothing to do with the rest of the evening, and his namesake was sufficiently amusing to pass the time. He also felt a little interested in the man, and the brandy bottle was put on the table at his suggestion, in case Mr. Dillon felt that he could manage more than one.

As he had expected, the warmth of the drink unloosed the tongue of William Dillon, and he began to unfold a tale of tribulation and persecution. All manner of people had persecuted him. Jews and members of the Salvation Army, policemen and merchants rushed in a chaotic jumble across the horizon of his mind, all bent upon his downfall, and there was a hint of some period which had been spent in deep seclusion, and to which he alluded bitterly.

He had been on his beam ends only a short

while back, and then an opportunity had arisen for a fresh start.

A man of the name of Radstock wanted a partner, and through the good offices of a friend Dillon had succeeded in getting the post. It was taking him to Rangoon, and he had a natural hatred of all Eastern ports. "I know I shall die if I go there. There was Sappy Hammond, a feller I knew, and he went East and hopped it—snuffed out in a month. And there was poor little Fish, Fishy Fish we used to call him, and the very same thing happened to him. It's on my mind like a ruddy pall, and whenever I think of it I go cold all over."

"What are you going to do when you get there?" Dillon asked, wondering what possible post the man with whom he was talking could undertake. Radstock had not seen him and was buying a pig in a poke, but the mutual friend was sufficiently mysterious in his choice.

"What am I going to do?" he asked. "Why help him with his business. He is a trader." William Dillon grew suddenly reticent. "It's a great asset to have a white man. Prestige, you understand. They can get plenty of caffy o'lay, but what they want is the real thing. Like myself."

"Rather a chance for you," Dillon said, consolingly. "When do you start?"

"To-morrow," William replied miserably. "Don't remind me of it. You seem such a good feller that you'll understand when I say that I want to forget."

"But anyhow it will make you feel permanent," Dillon suggested, since his namesake appeared to lay so much stress on the idea of having a settled address. "There's always that consolation."

"Permanent, I should rather think so," William Dillon replied, "with a nasty little head-stone to keep me down. There's certainly permanence in that."

An idea had begun to form itself dimly in the mind of Quentin Dillon. It was so fantastic and without any of the reasoned qualities which recommend new ideas to the majority of mankind, that he hesitated to express his mind at once and dallied with the thought, offering William Dillon another drink which he accepted without the vulgar necessity of being pressed.

"Is the work commercial?" Quentin asked.

"Commercial?" William Dillon sipped lovingly at his glass. "Oh, no! Oh, no! I'm not a business man. I told you they want a *cachay*, and my friend who put me in the way of it said that Radstock managed the finances himself. He said"—the extra brandy was doing its work—"that all I need do was to live at the Palm Hotel on the docks—it's a smart, flash sort of place, dress myself well, and make friends with fellers who want company and fun and all that sort of thing, and who, at the same time, are out for trade. Radstock trades everything, and it's part of his business to entertain and make things go. Knowing that I am a cheery

sort of feller my friend singled me out, and beggars can't be choosers in this ruddy old world."

Dillon lighted a cigarette and looked down at the table cloth, following the pattern with an abstracted finger. He had meditated the usual voyage to the East, which, after all, would only change externals. If he made new friends they would hardly be distinguishable from the old, and nothing in particular called to him from the unknown. It is extremely difficult to step outside the boundaries of "that state in life to which it has pleased God to call you," and there had not been any real uplifting of his heart as he looked forward to the change. Here, opposite to him at the table, there sat a man from whom he could borrow all the necessary variety that was lacking in the other scheme. He could square William Dillon quite easily, as he was wholly averse to his own fate, selected for him by the mutual friend. Quentin was pretty sure that the job which awaited William Dillon was that of a decoy of some kind, and his interest intensified, like a tightened violin string, and he could feel a strong thrill of quickening interest.

Dillon was not in the habit of looking before and after, and hardly had the notion crystallised in his mind before he immediately began to consider it as something practicable and settled. He looked again at the shabby creature who had begun to sing in a husky voice of unutterable despair, "Go where glory waits

thee," in a low lamenting tone, several notes flat. He was deeply affected by his own music, and looked hopelessly mournful. Had he been celebrating his own death or serenading his ashes he could not have looked a more pathetic and deplorable figure.

"Tell me more about Radstock," Dillon said, interrupting the dirge.

"How can I tell you?" the heavy man snapped suddenly. "Don't you understand that I've never seen him. I have had a decentish letter—you can always tell a gentleman's handwriting as it's usually so bad—and a cheque for my passage money. I'm to sail on the *Thebaw's Queen* to-morrow, from London Docks, and he's to meet me at Rangoon—and—oh yes, I'm to keep an eye on a niece of his wife's, Miss Keith, who is also going out by the same damned ship. I don't want her." William Dillon grew truculent. "What'd I want her for? Just my luck to get stuck with that kind of nursery-maid's stunt."

Quentin reflected again. Miss Keith might be a very distinct drawback to his own scheme. If she inherited what he suspected to be the family tradition, she was, as likely as not, just the type he most actively desired to avoid, but he knew that she would have to be an extremely clever young lady if she interfered with him to any real extent. In any case, if he was to step into William Dillon's chair and take his hand at the game, he would have to accept Miss Keith as well, while declining inwardly to hold himself responsible for her.

"Listen," he said, putting his hand on William Dillon's arm as he was about to fill his glass again, "I'll make you a firm offer, Dillon. You and I have the same names. You don't want to go East, I do. What will you take for your job, and the ticket out?"

Dillon the second stared and gasped. His face grew a hot-red and he seemed unable to speak, for he swallowed and gulped and made no coherent sound. "What are you saying?" he asked at last. "Are you having me on? Are you meaning it? It's not fair if you ain't."

"I do mean it."

"You'll go to Rangoon and be *me*?" he pointed at his rumpled waistcoat with his thumb, and a queer, flickering look as of indescribable amusement flitted over his face, for he was in deadly earnest. "I'll take—I'll take a hundred pun', if you can go as high as that. Can you give a hundred pun'?" He looked at Quentin eagerly. "If you can't in the lump, you might in instalments, old boy. I'd trust you. You've an honest face and an honourable way about you. You'd not split either, or let Radstock know?" Once the flood-gates of speech were loosed, William Dillon appeared to have more than enough to say. He began to expand on the subject of the job. In the hands of "a clever feller like yourself, o' man," it might bring in a big income. If it did, William felt sure that Quentin would send a further cheque out of gratitude, and it took time to stem the flow of his discourse.

In the end William Dillon looked rather askance at the cheque which Quentin wrote for him, but as he had professed the most complete confidence, he was forced to accept it after some hesitation. Quentin gave him notes to cover the expense of the ticket, and the whole arrangement took only a little more than an hour.

They parted in the coffee-room, and Quentin was aware of a strange sensation as he looked at William Dillon and shook his flabby hand. He knew absolutely nothing about the man, and yet he was undertaking to intercept his destiny, whatever it actually might turn out to be. It was whimsical and fantastical indeed, as a project, and there was enough of the blindness of chance in it all to lend a zest to the experiment. This could not be described as gambling with some one else's life at any rate, for it was really playing a lone hand with an unknown adversary.

"Good luck, ole feller," William Dillon said tearfully. "Don't miss the boat, for God's sake. It would make trouble with Radstock, and Radstock's not the sort to put up with slackness."

The swing doors parted and swung to again, and William Dillon vanished between them. He had gone as completely as though the whole incident had been a dream. Only the ticket and a letter telling him that he was expected at the Palm Hotel remained of him, and as Quentin gathered up his new possessions. His boxes were packed and ready, and he had only

to tell the boots that he was to be called in time to get to London Docks at 6 a.m.

He did not regret his impulsive act as he went to bed and slept soundly, nor did he regret it when he awoke to a dreary day of heavy rain. At any rate, whatever else it was going to be like, Rangoon would offer him sunshine. There was something intensely funny about it all when he thought of the man whose name was the same as his own. Radstock had indeed bought a pig in a poke, and what he would do about it was the next question. No, not quite the next, for the first there was the voyage out, and Miss Keith. Quentin shrugged his shoulders. He had no intention of allowing her to impose herself upon him, but then there would be no need, if he knew anything of the ways and habits of ships' officers.

THE *Thebaw's Queen* was an elderly, if not an exactly old liner, and the second-class accommodation was small and contracted. The ship was crowded with people when Quentin arrived, and discovered his own cabin in a kind of rat-burrow at the end of a tiny alley-way.

All around him partings were in progress, some of them tearful and others light-hearted enough, and the welter of many personalities imprisoned in limited space jarred and jangled as inevitably happens on such occasions, and there was a sense of strain and temper everywhere.

On the upper deck the first-class passengers were able to give more room to their emotions, but where Quentin found himself—in the company of a number of children and nursemaids and a varied gathering of very ordinary-looking people—there was nothing specially romantic or poignant in the scene.

He took up his place at the farthest end of the lower deck and watched the crowd, and wondered which of the women he saw there might be Miss Keith. Not the girl with the sailor blouse and the black curls, he hoped. If it were so, he intended to hide his own identity, for if ever anyone looked capable of taking care of herself it was that young lady.

The moment of departure arrived late in the afternoon, and Quentin leaned on the rail with the rest. He had telegraphed to his mother and Sandra, and they might possibly be with him in the spirit, but none of the handkerchiefs waving pathetically were giving him farewell, and for a second he was slightly staggered at the thought of his own undertaking and what it might entail.

The racing water and the dull heaviness of the sky depressed him, and still he leaned on the rail watching the white foam flying in the wake of the *Thebaw's Queen*. There was incessant noise everywhere, and the steady pulse of the engines, the singing of the wind and the chatter of voices, and already people wanted food, and were searching for places to stake their claim with deck chairs. Everything was dislocated on the first day of the voyage, and Quentin got a book from his pocket and began to read.

His associates did not please him, his cabin was a black hole which he suspected of being a haunt of cockroaches, and he discovered that the lower deck was where all the children played, so that peace or quiet was out of the question, and the limited space where he found himself was likely to be about as peaceful as a crèche or the middle of a crowded street. A collection of the individuals demonstrating, between sea and sky, that you carry the world with you even if you hope to leave it behind ; and, to tell the truth, his new world was not altogether a pleasing one to Quentin Dillon.

When the first-class passengers had finished dinner, the second-class passengers had their turn, and Quentin found a table steward and asked him whether he could tell him if there was a Miss Keith on board, and if so, which was her place at the long table.

With an easy familiarity to which Dillon was not accustomed, the steward winked at him and said "that would be quite all right," and after a little delay he came back to Quentin and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Which of them is your little bit of fluff?" he asked dubiously. "You see, there's three on board. One gets off at Colombo and the others go on."

"Describe them," Quentin suggested, looking down the darkling length of the deck, where square patches of yellow light showed through the entrance of the companion-way, and through open portholes. All else was undefined and vague, and the lingering colour of the sunset was reflected from a huge empty horizon of white-capped waters.

The steward thought for a moment. "Then you don't know the young lady by sight," he said. "I see. There's one who is elderly, a nuss in charge of an invalid gentleman in the first class. She's as sour as vinegar. Wears specs and has been pitching into the stoordess like 'ell already."

"Rule her out," Dillon laughed. "Put me a mile away from her, anyhow."

"Number 2 is more my fancy," the table

steward continued in friendly tones. "All smiles, and with a fine head of hair. Stylish. She'd be some fun, but the second officer seems rather taken. I had arranged to put her alongside of him."

"Don't alter that," Quentin said emphatically. "I wouldn't spoil sport for the world." He felt sure that this was the girl he had seen on deck, and also that she was Radstock's niece.

"Number 3," the steward continued, "isn't my fancy. I don't suppose she'd speak without an introduction. Rather too high and mighty, but she's a fine-looking piece of goods. More on the first-class line. She'll keep herself to herself."

"Then put me beside her." Quentin proffered a tip.

"You like 'em quiet?" the steward asked. "Some do. I took you for an officer when I first saw you. I suppose you're in business?"

"Yes," Dillon agreed, and he went off to his cabin, which he shared with a Baptist missionary, who was already suffering direly from the motion of the ship.

He was thankful to feel that Miss Keith was already interesting the second officer, and made up his mind to avoid her with all possible determination. She was wearing a lace blouse, her hair was ornamented with a variety of diamond combs, and her laugh rang loud and metallic from where she sat. The seat beside

his own was empty, and he concluded that Miss Keith Number 3 was perhaps no better a sailor than the American minister. If so he might avoid all intercourse with the feminine portion of the passengers during the voyage, and he sat down and looked at the menu card.

The dining saloon was fiercely lighted overhead, and the queer smell of food, oil and sea penetrated everywhere. The rushing of waves beyond the closed portholes made a long-drawn obligato to the din of voices and the sound of knives and forks, and the whole burden of it affected him strangely like a spell. He was creating a good deal of interest as he sat there silently, and Miss Keith, at the right of the second officer who presided at the table, showed that she was fully aware of his presence, for she cast him more than one encouraging glance.

It was all quite devoid of illusion, harsh and rather ugly as a picture; and just as Quentin was deciding what he would drink, the table steward gave him a gentle nudge with his elbow as he bent over him, and Quentin looked up.

He had some difficulty in believing the sight which met his eyes, and for a second it seemed almost as though he were dreaming, for from between the velvet curtains which closed the far end of the saloon from the alley-way beyond a girl came through, walking slowly and searching for her place, and at the sight of her

Dillon experienced a sudden electric shock, for it was none other than "the lady sweet and kind."

She came to the vacant place at his side and sat down.

At first he hardly dared to look at her, but after a few minutes he glanced at her profile. Her hair was bright golden and brushed straight back from her low, broad forehead, and her eyes were the clearest grey. Her features were, as he remembered them, rather irregular and her mouth was by no means faultless in line, but there was a sweetness about it which excused it sufficiently for not being classical. She was slender and gracious in figure, and his first sense of her being intensely individual was accentuated. She was wearing a white muslin dress, open a little at the throat, and a faint scent of violets came to him over the ship smells, like the fragrance of a spring day.

Calling his wits to his assistance, Quentin ordered a bottle of red wine. He ought to have ordered stout to be in keeping with the part he had set out to play, but for a moment he had forgotten that he was not Quentin Dillon, but a needy adventurer who was out to skin his fellow men.

And then he was aware that Miss Keith was looking at him in some astonishment, and their eyes met and she smiled involuntarily.

"We have seen each other before," he said, snatching at the opportunity, and he just stopped

himself before he uttered the hopeless banality that the world was a small place.

"So we have," she said. "That day at the gallery." She looked straight into his dark gaze, and then flushed slightly and looked away again.

Dillon began to make conversation. He felt sure that she was the Miss Keith who was "getting off and walking, at Colombo," as the table steward had said, and he had a sudden longing to tell her that he was only going as far as Ceylon.

"I am going to Rangoon," she explained, twirling Quentin's plans around like a teetotum. "It is my 'first arrival'—I think that is what it is called."

"So am I," Quentin said, trying to pay some attention to his food. "I was lucky enough to get work there. After the war it's not very easy to find. Are you staying on, or only globe-trotting?"

She laughed with a sudden spontaneous touch of amusement, and it came to Dillon over the inanity and the ineffable stupidity of the chatter around him. How had she got into such a pack? All the loud and ready laughter which was growing as acquaintances progressed favourably, awoke his intolerance, and he wanted to sweep her away from them.

"Globe-trotting? Surely I don't suggest anything so ambitious as that," she said. "I am going because I have to" she paused as

though on the edge of a personal confidence, and then changed her mind and said nothing further.

With an idea of drawing her into some admission of who she was and where she came from, Quentin became immediately frank. He told her that the war had left him stranded, and that he was now on his way to undertake a partnership with a man he had never seen. Remembering William Dillon's story of the mutual friend, he revived it, and explained that he had been chosen by a man who thought him suitable.

"Perhaps we shall meet there," she said, without the least touch of coquetry, as Quentin offered to peel her banana for her; bananas being the only fruit accorded to passengers of the second class.

"My partner is a man called Radstock," he said, his eyes on the banana. "Did you ever hear of him?"

"But this is too astonishing." She turned and looked at him with her steady, clear eyes. "You are speaking of my uncle. At least, of the man who married my aunt. I am going out to those very people, and neither of us have seen them yet."

"It is wonderful." He looked at her with a slight sense of alarm. The gods were almost too merciful and he doubted whether so much good fortune could be possible. "Can you tell me anything about them? Can I not find you a deck chair and let us talk it over?"

The knowledge that they were both bound for the same destination seemed to dispel Miss Keith's slight reserve, and Quentin watched the girl whom he had imagined to be her disappear to a dark corner of the deck with another young man whom she had picked up during dinner, as he placed two chairs in a sheltered corner, where they were out of the high, tearing wind that swept the deck.

Gradually he pieced the background together which belonged to "the lady sweet and kind." Her pale face, with its pervading subtlety and distinction, was hardly clear to him in the darkness where they sat, and she talked quietly with a direct openness that touched his heart.

Her home was broken up through death, and he caught a glimpse of a house in the west of Ireland where she had lived with her father, whose chief pursuit was gardening and who, like his own Uncle Arthur, took a fanatical interest in church matters. He pictured her in a firelit drawing-room with tall windows and faded paper on the walls; river and wood outside, and barren, purple mountains where sunsets burned golden over the shoulder of the hills.

Her life must have been full of the quiet of a wide country, and grey soft rain, and blue clear skies. Marion had never been anywhere else, so that the wide world was rather a menacing place to her. She was, he gathered from scattered dates she alluded to, about twenty-three

and had sometimes—only sometimes—wished that something would happen.

Nothing had happened for years, except what was expected, like Christmas, and the steady flow of the changing seasons ; a little occasional gaiety when she went to a dance at Ramelton, and the annual excursion to Dublin for the Horse Show. She knew that her mother's sister had married a man called Radstock and gone to the East, but more than that she did not know. Her mother was only the dimmest memory, and there had always been a breach between the families, though she did not know the reason of it.

Then the skies had fallen. Marion Keith's father had died quite suddenly, and instead of inheriting the grey stone house and wide garden, she found herself exiled. A cousin whom she had never seen inherited everything under the law of entail, down to the last of the heavy Georgian silver teaspoons, and beyond a small sum of ready money which lay to her father's credit at the bank, there was nothing at all for his daughter.

It was then that the dim, unknown figure of her Aunt Mildred had loomed upon the horizon. In reply to a letter telling her that her brother-in-law was dead, she had written saying that bygones should be bygones, and that she was prepared to offer her niece a home.

As she had no training of any kind, the offer came to Marion as a godsend, and she wanted

to get right away from the house, never to see it in the hands of strangers.

"I can't tell you how I love the place," she said wistfully. "I have never been the kind of person who is content with half a loaf. I'd really rather have no bread. Anyhow, Aunt Mildred was extremely kind, because she knows nothing whatever about me, except what I look like in a photograph; and as it flattered me disgracefully, she may get a shock when we meet."

"It will be a change," he said thoughtfully. Quentin was thinking how frank she had been. She had admitted him into her confidence with such readiness, and he was storing up his new impressions of her, and in return he could tell her almost nothing. He was pledged to William Dillon to play the part he had undertaken with Radstock. So long as he was working with Radstock he could keep in touch with Marion Keith, and he frowned as he remembered William Dillon's description of the kind of job it was, that he had parted with, not out of any squeamishness, but because he was nearly frightened to death. The Palm Hotel—a "flash place"—where he was to take upon himself to meet "fellers who wanted to see life." He thought of the hot, tropical setting and compared it instantly with the cold, pure winds blowing sweet over lake and bog. Marion was going out from the one, unprepared and unprotected, into the other. Yet what had her coming out done for him? The whole mad

enterprise, undertaken on the spur of the moment, leaped into life and meaning for him. There was something more than chance or romance in the juxtaposition of events. A slight chill, like the passing influence of something evil, crossed his keen excitement, with a shiver of apprehension.

She was talking to him again, telling him how she had come to London to get her outfit, and had chanced to walk into the picture gallery where she felt only stupid and old fashioned, because none of the pictures she saw there were in the least real to her. "I am absurdly ignorant," she said with sudden shyness, "and here I am sitting talking to you of nothing but myself. Please tell me something in return."

Dillon looked out at the narrow strip of cloudy sky, visible over the rails, and the sighing of wind and water sounded in his ears. "Myself?" he said. "There isn't really very much for me to say. I'm afraid I haven't been a very satisfactory person, so far. However, there's always a lot to be said for a new start."

She was a little hurt, he knew that directly she pulled her cloak around her shoulders and said she must go to her cabin, and he got up at once and walked with her to the lighted door.

He saw her go down the stairway, and she turned and smiled back at him. She was too entirely frank and straightforward to be anything but friendly, but he felt that she must wonder *why* it was that he had nothing to say.

The table steward greeted him with a friendly grin as he turned away. "Not letting the grass grow under your feet, Mr. Dillon," he remarked. "If you'd seen life to the extent I 'ave on voyages, you'd be able to write volumes," and he went onwards with the air of a philosopher who has outgrown the possibility of astonishment.

THE voyage, like all voyages, was subject to the usual vicissitudes of such crowded occasions, and yet the days certainly marked a deepening of friendship on the side of Marion Keith, and Quentin Dillon gave himself up completely as a man who had lost his heart.

He could not see into any imaginary future. Marion might care for him, but there were times when she avoided him and days when he hardly spoke more than half a dozen words to her. Ship's gossip had reached her ears, and she evidently resented it, for she made it clear that she did not intend Quentin to sit for ever at her side in a long chair, and as he feared to drive her away from the deck, he accepted the silent protest on her part, and played bridge and poker with his fellow voyagers in a stifling smoking-room.

Had she been the Miss Keith who was leaving the ship at Colombo, he would have forced the pace and insisted that she must listen to all he intended to tell her sooner or later, but, as it was, there was time, and he chose rather to possess his soul with what patience he could.

There were the usual parties formed to "see sights" at Port Said and Colombo. Deplorable parties were made up by the more energetic

organisers on the *Thebaw's Queen*, and Quentin, who abhorred trips or trippers, had perforce to make one of a staring crowd. He was aware he was not doing things sufficiently on the cheap, and when he found, on arriving at Colombo, that the Baptist missionary had formed a select gathering under his own chaperonage which included Marion Keith, he said that he could not afford it, and remained sulkily on board until every one had forsaken him. When they were all gone, he regretted his choice, and thought longingly of an excursion to Newaralia, on a car, of course, but then he couldn't be expected to afford such a preposterous piece of extravagance. Marion Keith and the American Baptist, accompanied by his wife and three children, were going to Mount Lavinia, and it would be hateful to sit there and drink ginger-beer without the smallest chance of seeing her alone.

He left the ship in a raging temper, and walked along the colonnades where heaped unset stones were piled in trays behind the glass of the jewellers' windows, and everywhere he looked he saw something beautiful which he wanted to buy for her. At the end of a wholly unsatisfactory day, he retired to the veranda of the Galle Face Hotel and watched the red road with drowsy introspective eyes.

Dillon was awakened from his dreams by the voices of two men talking just behind him at a small table, and the name of Radstock came to him with the sudden effect that follows upon

the casual mention of names which are known to us.

The men who sat behind him were dressed in white from shoes to hat, and the hot, heavy day was drawing to its shining close over a still sea, so that the light was soft, and the chicks had been rolled up to let in the cooler air. Dillon could not see the faces of the men who were speaking, as he was sitting with his back towards them, but one of them had a deep, assertive voice, and the other had all the remains of a cockney accent which had been cultivated out of its original twang.

"I'm not afraid of anything Radstock can do," the man with the cockney voice said, with the enthusiasm of great conviction. "It's all very fine for you to talk. What did I get? Two hundred and fifty dollars, and had to clear out. You made a bit yourself, even if you aren't owning up to it." His voice was raised suddenly to a high note. "All the same, I'm with you that he's going too far."

"He's gone too far," the other voice replied heavily. "But I believe he has a partner coming out."

"Oh, so? I didn't know that. What sort of a partner?"

"Some one he can keep under his fist—or so I gathered. And there's Mrs. Rad's niece. Did you hear of her?"

"No, not a whisper. I see they've been keeping me in the dark."

"Oh, a pretty bit of a thing, by the photo,"

the man with the deep voice added a laugh to his comment. "She'll need to have her wits well about her"—he got up and they went out together, still talking and evidently amused, and Quentin watched them with a feeling of mingled anger and dismay. His future partner was going to be no better or worse than he had expected, but it maddened him to hear Marion spoken of in such a way by such people.

He got up, realising that it was time he went back to the *Thebau's Queen*, and that evening Marion gave him no opportunity to talk to her alone. She used the Baptist missionary and his wife like a shield to protect her from his attack, and once again he was driven away to the smoking-room.

During the last days of the voyage his "lady sweet and kind" was provokingly elusive. When he was able to get her alone, she was perfectly gracious and natural; there was no tightening of her fastidious upper lip, or widening of the distance between them, but he felt that she deliberately decided that she would let him come no closer, as he looked at her delicate, spiritual mouth and longed to kiss it and discover whether it could become yielding and human. She was quiet as moonlight, and she spoke of the end of the journey with growing excitement.

"I have always lingered about on the edge of crowds," she said, as they leaned on the rail watching the hazy distance of the Burmese coast lying like a purple shadow beyond the

glaring blue of the sea, " and now I suppose I shall have to go into the arena. I do wonder what they are like ? " She looked at him as though she tried to understand something of her own strength and weakness. As he looked at her he felt her clear, ardent nature reaching forth to fresh possibilities like a strong swimmer going out to face the swinging tides.

" Whatever they are like we have our friendship," he said. He was wearing his London-made white clothes, and had taken off his topi under the shadow of the upper deck, so that his dark eyes and tanned face were cast into strong relief, and Quentin Dillon looked blazingly alive.

The blood came with a rush to her cheeks and forehead, and she avoided his look. " Yes," she said hesitatingly. " It's all so strange, Mr. Dillon."

" I was told to take care of you, and all I have done is to watch the admirable Mr. Spencer and his wife turn you into a nursemaid. I wonder what your aunt will want you to do ? "

" I used to feel that I was sitting still while everything and every one else went racing off, and now I'm losing nerve because it's all——" she paused and repeated her former remark—" it's all so strange."

" Am I strange ? " he asked impulsively.

" You are the strangest bit of it all." She lowered her eyes and spoke rather quickly. " You see, Mr. Spencer doesn't seem to like my uncle, and I have felt once or twice that he and his wife were almost trying to put me on

guard. As you *do* know something of my uncle, can you tell me if there is anything——” she broke off distressed and even agitated.

“ I wish to God there was anything I could tell you,” Dillon said earnestly. “ I don’t know any more than you do.”

She seemed to consider what he said again, and then she withdrew herself, and her interest forsook her so that she became cold and spiritless. He had disappointed her, and he knew, somehow, that she turned to look back to the grey house with the purple hills behind it and the dark ilex trees that grow along the drive. She had never spoken of it again to him since their first meeting, but he could tell when she returned there in spirit, and that she always did return when she felt herself lonely and disconsolate. She was casting back now to her first beginnings as the glory of the East spread itself out before her.

“ Mr. Spencer tells me that my uncle is said to be a very rich man,” she said, collecting herself again. “ I dread rich people; they seem almost uncanny to me, because we were poor, and every one I know was poor. Do you think they will have that awful thing, a large establishment, Mr. Dillon? I don’t even know all the right forks and spoons to use, and I shall be ridiculously shy.”

A real fear of the Radstock *menage* held Quentin silent. It was quite possible that Radstock did keep up an ostentatious display for his own reasons, and he was certain to

entertain unless he lived a double life ; but the introduction of Marion into the household hinted at a definite plan for her exploitation.

" My aunt told me in her last letter that you would be coming out with me, and that I mustn't make too many friends on the voyage, as Uncle Rad has to be particular," she laughed. " Perhaps she meant you ? " and fearing she might have hurt him, she shook her head. " Of course, I was only joking, and you do give me a feeling of safety. I think this arrival is rather like dying slowly."

" Why ? " he said quickly. " What on earth makes you think that ? "

" Because all I do know is, that nothing I do know now will be of any use to me. Everything will be strange. I have no landmarks."

Mr. Spencer joined them, full of fussy information, and Quentin looked away to where the first outposts signified that the *Thebaw's Queen* had crossed the bar and was entering the wide, troubled entrance to the Rangoon River. They were having this experience in common, Marion Keith and he, and he looked over the mud flats and the sand flats where the first sign of straggling houses lay like the thin end of a lizard's tail, and corrugated tin sheds blazoned with the names of oil companies, teak companies and rice merchants stared grimly out over their wharves. Plaster houses and bungalows, the colour of cigar boxes, double-storied and with outside shutters to the windows, stood behind neglected gardens, and

the effect of it all was curiously mordant and oppressive, as though one had wandered into a dream, not without beauty, but which is far from comforting or inspiring. The snatches of life which he saw along the banks seemed to cover a cosmopolitan range of races. Straw-hatted Chinamen, clad in meagre blue linen coats and wearing wide shan trousers, mixed with wild looking men in fantastically dyed wrappings, smooth Madrassis and stout steady-going Burmese in silk petticoats and white jackets.

He handed his glasses to Marion Keith. "Have a look at your neighbours," he said, "and tell me what you think of them."

"I don't know what I think," she said, moving a little closer to him suddenly. "But wait, wait until you look again." She handed him back his glasses, and Dillon strained his eyes to catch the first sight of the high golden spire of the Shwey Dagone, raising itself beacon-like against the sky. A shaft of sunlight caught it and turned it into a living splendour, and as he looked, absorbed in the sudden graciousness of the sight, Marion touched his arm.

"I shall remember that when I have forgotten those haunted-looking bungalows," she said. She seemed to be enrapt in the glory of life. Her youth was going to move through the mysterious city that lay in the purple shadows ahead of the steadily ploughing ship, and her dreams were transfigured by her rising hope. She was happy and her eyes shone.

Quentin watched her with a touch of pain at his heart. He was nearing the moment when he would have to go to the Palm Hotel to take up his doubtful rôle, and Radstock would have to show his hand to him, however much he hid it from others.

He and his "lady sweet and kind"—this excessively young Irish girl—were cast out together upon the waters of life. Quentin was forced to marvel at the romance of such a destiny, thankful to know that he was thrown on the same racing current and being swept towards the same end, as far as any mortal calculation could foretell.

ARRIVAL descended quickly upon the *Thebaw's Queen*, and amid fierce shouting and a conflict of noise she was drawn to the landing stage and the gangways were let down. In the rush which followed, and the good-byes, which were either neglected or protracted according to the degree of intimacy which the voyage had brought about, Quentin lost Marion Keith temporarily, and only saw her again as she followed a short stout man across the gangway. She waved to him and seemed, so Dillon thought, to say something to her companion, but he only hurried her onwards, and a block on the deck prevented any chance of Quentin catching up with her again.

His own affair was to find the Palm Hotel, and deposit his luggage and then await some sign from Radstock, so he wandered off slowly, taking in his first impressions of Rangoon. Behind the wharf there was a wide road, bordered by gold mohur trees in brilliant crimson flower, and at the further end where tram lines crossed and trams passed with much jarring and shrieking, the Palm Hotel reared itself straight and narrow, and towering over the neighbouring houses. Dillon had arranged that his luggage was to be taken there on a hand-cart

and was in no special hurry to look at his own quarters, so he turned up a side street and passed by sudden transition into a new world.

Colour ran riot around him ; painted doors, green and savage red, decorated with tarnished gilding, struck a vivid note, acrid and shrill against the blue and magenta plaster of the houses. He suspected that strange lives, strange dirt and strange evils might exist behind the subtle, drowsing quiet of closed jinmills and from there he ran incontinently into the coolie slums of the town, with little dark streets of dwellings intersected and twined one into the other like a knot of struggling worms, heavy with the reek of dead fish, living humanity, spiced food and ghee.

With some difficulty he escaped from the squalid environment and got back to the Chinese quarter, which held its secrets well. You could only guess at possible opium dens and gaming houses, though the restaurants proclaimed themselves frankly with open doors, where already the soft light falling from six-foot paper lanterns mingled with the oncoming evening. He was interested and amused by what he saw, and thinking that probably by this time Radstock might have decided to come to interview his new partner, he walked back to the Palm Hotel.

The hotel was very much what he had expected it to be. Beyond the fact that it was built to suit a tropical climate, it was practically no more than an Eastern reproduction of the

hotel near Paddington where he had met William Dillon. There was greater freedom of manner and speech, and there were a number of native servants ; but the atmosphere was the same, and the men who sat about looked much the same except for their crumpled white suits and a far greater lavishness in the matter of expenditure. His room was on the second story and looked out at the back directly into a half-derelict establishment, rented, it appeared, by a number of different people. On the ground floor a " French Pin Man " had done his best to live and given up the struggle ; only his sign remained, and it hung there as all things hang in the East, until an earthquake or a storm should come to blow it down. Quentin stood for a time thinking of the departed Pin Man, and wondering whether he had gone back to France or more probably just drifted into the bazaar and remained there lying on a string bed insufficiently clothed, and having decided to go native.

He had a curious quick sense towards places, and the atmosphere of the Palm Hotel was highly flavoured. Already he knew that the conventional rules more or less hypocritically observed in the West, were slackened, and you could see the easier attitude in the eyes and speech of the men who had been gathered in the bar as he passed through. He looked again at the world below his window. It was fantastic, changing and dream-like, exotic in its suggestion ; alluring to his unaccustomed eyes.

The external objects he saw seemed by some trick of magic to form themselves into a group of impressions, beginning with his first sight of Marion Keith in the picture gallery.

She had been the first visible link in a chain of events, and it was she who had awakened him from the stupor of the past which had laid its numbing grasp upon the empty present. Then there had been the ridiculous affair of Wade. Occasionally our enemies do more for us than our friends, because they sting us into action, and Wade had produced the effect of a mosquito bite, followed by its consequent restlessness.

Sandra had added to the growing force which urged him forward, because she would not administer an anodyne. She had been wiser, far wiser than he had guessed. Good Sandra, dear Sandra, who had been very gentle in her refusal. And then there came the meeting with William Dillon; another act in this variegated, dramatic list of circumstances and, in its way, the most decisive of all. Following closely upon his wayward changing of identities, Marion stepped into the picture again, and there was the voyage and his ever growing love for her. The next step would be his meeting with Radstock, and whatever he thought of him he would have to play his part carefully and well. It was no longer a mad-cat experience and capable of being flung aside the moment it became distasteful to him. It involved far bigger issues and far more precise consideration.

He studied his own face carefully. There was nothing of the *roué* or the blackguard about him, and he was always extremely well dressed. He was to induce men to come and be skinned by Radstock, and only by keeping in with Radstock could he protect Marion. There was an alternative which it was yet too early to suggest, and that was that Marion should marry him ; his eyes softened. But she was not to marry William Dillon, the man of impermanence. How could he suggest it at present ? What was his own background, the Palm Hotel and a distinctly ill-conditioned reputation ? He could not tell her that Dawn and a decent record really lay behind him, and that if she allowed her life to join in with his it would not engulf her in a murky, disreputable sea. She might forgive this and love him in spite of all, but Quentin made a pact of honour with himself, saying that he would not offer her a despicable past. Until he could tell her everything, he decided to tell her nothing.

" I hope I'm a good impostor," he said in his heart, as a knock at his door made him turn, and he was informed by a strangely decayed-looking servant in a tattered red serge coat and dirty white draperies, that Radstock Sahib was in the lounge, and sent his *salaams* to Dillon Sahib.

Radstock was sitting at a small table, taking no notice of anyone. He was a short, stout man with thick and very wooden-looking legs, his hair was grey and rather scanty and his face

plump and even childish. His eyes were pale, of a washed-out blue, and he had a tow-coloured moustache of the rather flowing kind. Either he was short-sighted, or for reasons of his own he affected to be so, for he wore a single eyeglass without a cord, and there was a perkiness about the sharp line of his nose. His figure had run to seed, and though a wide gulf separated him outwardly from the far lower degree of William Dillon, there was just a sufficient hint of likeness somewhere in the whole effect to awaken the suspicions of an acute observer. In manner he was extremely hearty and cheerful, and when he saw Quentin coming he certainly did not for a moment suppose him to be the man he was there to meet, for he was quite genuinely astonished when he introduced himself.

"You're Dillon?" Radstock dropped his eyeglass and put it into his waistcoat pocket. "I had imagined, somehow, that you would be a much older man." He looked with a quick, searching glance at Quentin as he added, still in a friendly tone, "You appear to have stood the life well."

"I can stand most things," Quentin said morosely.

"I dare say, I dare say." Radstock held out a hand covered with a forest of hair, which struck Quentin as being extremely repulsive. "I was only remarking that you appear to have a good constitution."

Dillon laughed and ordered two glasses of vermouth. He had expected some one far more

buccaneering than this ordinary-looking middle-aged man, and he decided to let him do all the talking. He was under orders, and Radstock must be the one to lay his first card on the table.

But it appeared that Radstock was in no hurry. He talked of indifferent subjects and spoke of his "little plan," without entering into details.

"I specially wish you to understand," he said rather unpleasantly, "that our footing must be a business one. Now and then I may want you to dine at my house, and if so you will come. Otherwise, the less we are seen together the better. I hear that you looked after Miss Keith on the voyage. With regards to her"—his pale eyes grew narrow—"the acquaintance need not progress. She is with her aunt now, and there is not the least need for you to meet, unless quite occasionally. I am not particular"—he waved his monkey-like hands—"but my wife is."

Quentin said nothing. This was straight talk, certainly, and it was more politic to refuse to take offence. To sit in the second-rate surroundings and allow an ill-bred little man, who was nothing more than a common swindler, deliberately to snap his fingers in his face, might not be agreeable, but at the same time there was nothing for him to say.

"I am very glad to hear it," was his comment.

Radstock glanced at him again rather

doubtfully and spread out his hands on the table.

"Nisbet, the proprietor of this hotel, is a gentleman," he said. "He will put you up for the club, and help you to get to know fellows."

"And when I do know them?" Dillon asked.

"I am running a private club," Radstock said. "On quite straightforward lines, of course, where those who like something a little more racy than bridge can have a flutter now and then. You are a casual acquaintance, and it's to be regarded as a favour to be introduced into membership—you understand?"

"I understand."

"Good. Well, on the whole, I like the look of you. I was hardly prepared"—Radstock gave a rather malicious laugh—"for anyone quite so fashionable, but it's all to the good. In fact, I'm quite pleased about it."

"As the club meets at your own house"—Quentin ignored the implied compliment—"does Mrs. Radstock understand the situation?" He had no intention, on his part, of glozing over facts, and so far as he was concerned, the nakedness of the truth did not cause him any shame whatever.

"Mrs. Radstock? She knows what I tell her." Radstock half closed his eyes. "Having some sense she does not ask questions. The club meets at my house, which is a very large one, in Pagoda Road. I can give up two rooms to it, and mind you"—he suddenly grew angry,

and his voice was sharp and hissing—"I want you to choose carefully. I can't have fellows coming to play who aren't well able to afford it. If there is scandal, it puts a stop to everything. You will make it your business to find out this before you introduce men you may meet. There are men I won't have there, and generally speaking, I don't want any of the Peg Club lot, or traders who live in Rangoon"—he grew flushed with his angry eagerness. "Nor will I have mixed breeds, however much they can afford it. Chinks are outside this little scheme. I depend upon you to use tact."

"Very well," Dillon agreed. "I suppose that you will give me a little time for selection."

"Certainly, certainly." Radstock grew amiable again. "I'll be pushing along again now. The terms we agreed to were your keep—not including drinks—at the Palm, and a fair commission. I call it liberal."

"I don't know yet what I call it," Dillon said briefly.

"You're damned lucky," Radstock retorted. "After all, a fellow with your record to be floated into the best society and given the run of your teeth; it's a fine chance. Mac told me things," he went on hastily. "I took his word for it that you'd do, and you ought to do, but I know all about you, Mr. William Dillon." He reverted once more to his more friendly mood. "I say this so as you should know where you are. I don't judge my neighbours

or come down on them for their misfortunes ; it's not Christian."

"The less you say to me or to anyone else about my past record, the better," Quentin said with smouldering eyes. "So long as I shepherd in a fair number of lambs for you to shear that's all that matters to you, I take it."

Radstock got up and held out his hand. "We understand one another," he said, in a more subdued tone. "In the future we shall not meet here. When I want to talk privately to you you can come to Rosemary Villa, and see me privately."

Dillon took his hand reluctantly. He had never felt a more definite dislike towards any fellow creature, and in the effervescence of his temperament, his sense of disgust rose within him almost to bursting point. But unreasonable or even perfectly reasonable ardours of feeling were not to be exhibited if he was to maintain his shady partnership with Radstock, so he conquered his repulsion and shook the proffered hand.

He wanted desperately to know what Mrs. Radstock was like. She might be dependable. Many women had the bad luck to be married to blackguards and still kept their own integrity clean. If she were formed of different stuff to her husband, the lot of Marion Keith might not be altogether intolerable, but if she were not, he dreaded to think what ugly circumstances might surround her. He felt that he must

know at once what sort of woman she was, so he walked through the vestibule with Radstock in outward friendliness.

After debating in his mind whether he should suggest that he might call at Rosemary Villa after dinner, he finally decided that he would say nothing of his plan. Once he got there, he must trust to luck that fate would favour him, and if he spoke of it in advance Radstock might make it impossible for him to snatch the chance.

Quentin watched him go down the steps of the Palm Hotel and climb into a private gharry, driven by a *kotchwan* in green livery. The door of the queer, box-like vehicle was closed with a bang, and Radstock, his arms thrust into the straps at either side, looked out at him through the glass of the window, with a queer, mistrustful gaze, and amid the noises of the street the gharry drove away. There had been a touch of secret passion in his look, as though he doubted his own wisdom in a matter which meant life and death to him.

Quentin made a mental note of the look, and decided that he must induce a better feeling of security in the mind of Radstock. He dined alone at a small table under the whirring of electric fans set high in the ceiling, and took careful notice of the men who came and went. Not among these, he thought, were his lambs, and there was no special object in making fresh acquaintances ; but as he sat over a cup of black coffee he was joined by a man who came in

towards the end of his meal, and who sauntered up to his table.

He was a tall, rather affected, and conceited-looking man of forty-two or forty-three, with coarse red hair and a thick, well-cared-for moustache. Essentially second-rate, he made a huge effort to be excessively smart, and he spoke in a deep voice, adopting the air of a man of the world.

"I'm Nesbit," he announced. "And you, I believe, are Dillon."

Quentin admitted that it was so, and offered his new acquaintance a cigarette, but he declined it, and produced a long cigar which he lighted, explaining that he ran the hotel in which Dillon found himself, as a kind of experiment.

"That's the best of clearing out," he added, "one can do things here which wouldn't be possible at home. One's people, you understand, and so forth." As he swaggered abominably about himself, Quentin listened. Nesbit was determined to impress, and talked very largely indeed. He was, he said, an inn-keeper, and made a joke of it, but in a place like Rangoon you could stoop to conquer, and he was a member of all the social clubs, and went to dances in private houses. He knew the Lieutenant-Governor's A.D.C.'s, and, from his own account, he was one of the most sought after bachelors in Burma.

"Rad isn't a bad sort," he remarked, pulling at his cigar, which was not smoking satisfactorily. "Quite a sportsman. I rather took

on to that idea he spoke of, and I'll see you through. I've spoken to one or two fellows about you already, and it won't be long before you'll swear by the East—of course, there are some rather stuffy people about, but you'd find that everywhere."

"Do you know Mrs. Radstock?" Dillon asked cautiously.

"Every one knows Mrs. Rad," Nesbit shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "She's a type." But beyond this he would not go; whether his powers of description were weak, or he felt that he would prefer Dillon to approach her with an open mind, was not obvious, and he declined to be drawn into further admissions.

"You've been elected to the Sheldon and the Lake Clubs," he said, his uneasy eyes flickering over the room. "The Sheldon's a good place and every one goes there, tin gods and all. The Lake, too, only that isn't select. All the riff-raff can join, but sets never mix here. You'll have to see the fellows in the big shops—white, of course, but not any class."

Dillon remarked that he might survive the experience, and Nesbit invited him to his own rooms at the back of the Palm Hotel.

"I live here so as to keep an eye on things," he said, not because he felt it specially necessary to impress Quentin, whom he regarded as entirely beneath him, but merely because he always excused himself for having anything to say to his establishment.

"Not to-night," Dillon yawned; "I want to have a look around first."

Nesbit bestowed a peculiar smile on Quentin, which was a mixture of amusement and slyness, and was so distasteful to Dillon that he longed to hit the vulgarly handsome man in the face with his fist.

"I'll not offer to go with you," he said, "I have to be rather careful. For you, of course, it doesn't matter." And with that, he got up and swung out of the room, the servants scurrying away like frightened rabbits at his approach.

QUENTIN walked out into the brilliant tropical night where everything seemed to be more alive than it had been in the earlier hours. The huge bazaar lay between Wharf Street, where the Palm Hotel was situated, and the European residential quarter of the town.

Over his head the sky was spacious, calm and bright, with the shining of great stars, and around him the noises of life were penetrating and incessant. Red dust lay along the roads and hung in the air, and the passing of the water carriers with their large skin vessels with great bamboo spouts had added the smell of drenched dust to the other smells which were myriad in their power and number. The shops were still open, and might, for aught he knew, remain open for the night. Queer open fronted booths, where baskets were sold, and others, filled with mirrors, the prices chalked on the surface of the shining glass, sweet stalls, fruit stalls and numbers of cafés flanked by dusty tubs of plants, where crowds of customers swarmed like flies, some of them reclining on sofas set in the street itself. Tailors sitting on the ground, worked at sewing machines, and the frontages of the strange little places of business were decorated with signs inscribed in curling

Burmese characters, hooping and arching themselves into mysterious looking words.

A whole motley of colour possessed the centre of the street. Crimson, magenta, exquisite yellow and lapis lazuli, crashed into accord with royal purple and the tenderest sky blue. Burmen wearing yards of stiff rustling silk jostled lean Chinamen and Madrassis, and even Arabs in flowing white were in the throng, walking like high priests or princes and ignoring their surroundings royally.

Quentin took his way among the concourse, where screaming children fought and played in the gutter completely naked and undisturbed, among furtive shadows of pariah dogs and lean, ill-favoured cats. Publicity was everywhere—sometimes a rag of curtain covered the entrance to the dilapidated houses, but just as often it did not, and every one in all stages of dress or undress assembled to watch the night show of the streets.

Lights shone out in the high windows, and the story tellers came forth and squatted on the ground, gathering their audience with clapping hands and fierce gesticulation, and inside one house, where great green dragons curled up the fretted entrance, a sound of beating tom-toms and the strident singing of a gramophone invited the unfastidious within, the invitation repeated by faces which peered over the balcony, watching the street.

The river lay behind him where lamps gleamed in the mast riggings like dim stars, and

a great sheet of yellow light showed black figures working overtime alongside of a towering liner due to start at high tide in the morning. Little sampans glided in and out like whispers, and the whole sense of the place came upon Quentin with a bewilderment of feeling. The East was close to him here, and yet he stood utterly alien from it, understanding nothing except the externals ; the passionate mystery of the oppressive scent and vivid colour.

He steered his way to the two square towers of the Cathedral, which cut darkly against the sky, and came into the wide commercial quarter of the town, where, in strong contrast to the bazaar, everything seemed to sleep. Even the tamarisk trees seemed slumbering, and the tall houses of business were closed and shuttered, dreaming whatever dreams linger in such places until the staff returned in the morning, and the bulky prosperous managers and partners drove up in their motor-cars and dealt in financial matters for the short working hours of a tropical day.

Dillon had not any very clear directions as to where Rosemary Villa was situated, but he left the golden pillar of the Shwey Dagone gleaming in the starlight, and made onwards up a hill where a number of dark roofs showed at intervals behind walls of trees, all bearing a scented flower. Even if he did not find the place, the walk itself had enchantment enough, and it interested him to watch the occasionally passing carriages and cars and catch glimpses

of women in evening dress, and the men who were with them. It was the first time in his life that he had stood completely outside what would have been his own world, and though he suspected it to be a deadly place enough, it had at least attained a real touch of romance. He could never sit at dinner beside the women who flashed past in the scented, tropical night, and know their limitations ; so that they could remain fairy princesses to him.

After stopping one or two stray men, who were Europeans, with the usual result when asking the way in any strange place, Quentin accosted an extremely dark-skinned Eurasian, who actually knew something about the locality. He explained with an air of feverish eagerness that he knew Mister Radstock, and that Rosemary Villa was a large house standing on the summit of a steep ridge a short distance away. He even went so far as to accompany him to a narrow iron gate which opened on to a flight of stone steps.

A low moon had risen, and the garden lay under long, mystical shadows, the cannas and irises colourless under its rays, and white shawls of jessamine and the hanging festoons of acacia gleaming whitely in the strangeness of the light.

Dillon went up the steps and found himself in a terrace garden, in the centre of which there was a small pond covered with lotus in flower, and surrounded by high coarse grasses. A moss-grown image of grotesque shape stood in

the centre of the miniature lake, and tiny broken moonbeams fell through the branches of tall palm trees overhead. He could not distinguish very much in the unearthly light, except that though the grounds around Rosemary Villa were spacious and impressive, they were not well kept, for the path where he walked was grass grown, and he started aside quickly as a little shadowy creature slid along the ground past him into the undergrowth. Quentin had no liking for snakes, and he went onwards towards the veranda.

The house was, as Radstock had said, a very large one, and the sharp outline of the brown roof was picturesquely silhouetted against the sky, where some white, moonlit clouds drifted very slowly. The veranda was in deep shadow, and on the upper story the light from wide open windows mingled with the dim clearness outside. There was no other indication that the household was not asleep, for the long row of closed windows beyond were entirely dark. A colony of glow-worms hung on the creepers, shining mistily, and the heavy thud of the *Durwan's* stick came round the house at his approach.

The one thought uppermost in Quentin Dillon's mind was that he wanted to see Marion Keith, and to satisfy himself that Mrs. Radstock was a suitable person for her to be with. He was so wretchedly uneasy on the point, and found so little consolation when he thought of Radstock and Nesbit, that even his physical

weariness fell away, and he came to a standstill as the *Durwan* whined at him in nasal tones and demanded what he wanted. With great difficulty on both sides Quentin made it clear that he wished to go in and see Radstock Sahib, and the *Durwan* insisted that Radstock Sahib was not in the habit of receiving guests whom he did not expect. The word "*hookum*" played a large part in his complaint, but when Quentin, in sheer desperation, handed him a rupee, he went to a door at the further side of the house and, as it seemed to Dillon, scratched rather than knocked on it.

The door was opened, and the voice of Radstock, raised in sharp and angry invective, replied to the *Durwan's* cringing announcement that a Sahib wished to see the Sahib. Dillon hurried forward and, as he appeared in the shaft of light, Radstock's manner changed at once.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "What's brought you here?"

Dillon, without waiting to be invited, walked into the large, lofty room, where a number of lizards played and made dry and rattling noises up near the ceiling. The legs of the writing-table which stood in the centre of a worn and discoloured spread of *chittai*, were placed in wooden dishes of oil to prevent the attack of white ants, and a punka-proof lamp lighted the room indifferently, leaving the corners in heavy shadow. It was hot and stifling, and the dejected mat punka hung listless from the cobweb-covered poles overhead.

In the sanctum, which was apparently Radstock's private apartment, there was not the smallest sign of wealth or even moderate comfort, and Quentin sat down in a long chair and looked around him curiously. With his shadow thrown hugely on the wall behind him, Radstock stood watching his uninvited guest. He seemed doubtful as to whether he intended to bully him or whether he would appear polite, and on the whole his instinct inclined towards the latter course.

"I suppose you wanted to ask me something?" he said, sitting down. "And as you are here, I may as well show you the rooms we intend to use. But, first of all, what brought you here?"

"I came to ask whether, when I collect the flock, I am to splash a bit," Dillon said lazily. "You didn't make it clear. Nesbit couldn't say, when I met him to-night, and as I am to begin my social career at once I want more information. I thought of hiring a car, for instance, and when I come to the house, do I come as a friend of the family?"

"Hiring a car? Have you any idea of what that will cost you?"

"Not the smallest," Dillon said, only just remembering in time not to add that the keep of his own car had run into pretty tall figures. "I can drive," he added, "so that would save a chauffeur. On the whole, I think there is something to be said for doing the thing well."

Radstock grumbled to himself: "Do it at

your own risk," he said fractiously. "I didn't bargain for style. And as for your footing here, I won't have you taking everything for granted like this."

"Which is exactly what I am not doing," Dillon replied pacifically. "I am asking you to put me straight about it."

"I'll think it over," Radstock said sharply. "Come now and look at the rooms."

He went to a roughly-constructed door which opened into a passage, and led Quentin to the back of the house. There was another entrance, which could be used by the members of the so-called club, and the rooms which Radstock proposed to set at their disposal were swept and garnished. Mirrors hung on the walls and a few pictures, which filled Quentin with utter disgust. There was a large table covered with green baize cloth in the centre of each room, roulette boards and the toy-like appliances for *petits chevaux*. In these rooms there was electric light ; Radstock turned it on with the pride of a child and pointed out all the advantages of such a well-ordered place.

"Suppose we introduce one of the wrong sort by accident, won't all this give us away ?" Quentin asked.

"You've got to make sure. That's what you're there for," Radstock retorted. "I can't tout around on my own account—it wouldn't be good form."

He became restless as he spoke and evidently anxious that Dillon should leave, and once or

twice he glanced towards the door. "Keep in with Nesbit," he said in warning tones. "He has put a good deal into the place, and, besides, he's powerful."

"You didn't let him in without putting a noose over his head, surely?" Quentin asked with a smile.

"I've got him behind rails"—Radstock bit his fingers—"but it's rather a glass-house arrangement for all of us, except you." He shot out the words viciously. "You are roped up, Dillon, and don't you forget it. I'm not displeased with your lofty ways and all that—they'll do very well, but it's no use your thinking that you can put it over me—or Nesbit, for that matter."

He turned as he spoke and listened attentively, and then, making a sign to Dillon to follow, went towards the door, but before he reached it, it opened, and a woman stood there looking at them.

Directly he saw her, Quentin Dillon realised that Radstock had married a woman considerably older than himself; either that, or the climate had aged her and made her look very much the elder of the two. She was dark and wrinkled, and her hair was dyed a heavy black. The eyes under her painted eyebrows were sombre and rather menacing, even when she smiled, and she gave the impression of a passionate recklessness well under control. What struck Quentin most forcibly in his first glance at her was that she looked like a modern

hag. She was dressed in absurdly youthful clothes and wore a great quantity of jewellery, selected without the smallest reference to good taste, and though she spoke to Radstock her eyes never for a moment left Quentin's face.

"I fancied I heard voices," she said with a dreadful kind of geniality. "Is this Dillon?" She used no prefix, and she did not hold out her hand or stoop in any way to the smallest courtesies of life; she only went on talking, speaking to Quentin.

"I am glad to see you for myself," she said, appraising him with her deep-set eyes. "Miss Keith, my niece, spoke of you. She said you had been of some service to her on the voyage."

"Very little, I'm afraid," Quentin replied.

"She would like to see you," Mrs. Radstock went on, "and I see no special reason against it. You and she will have to meet from time to time. Of course you understand the position?"

"I am learning it," he said. He thought as he looked at her that he had never before seen a woman who appeared so entirely devoid of what, for want of a better phrase, is called "feminine charm."

"Then you can go upstairs, and you will find her in the drawing-room. She is tired, and you cannot stay long; please remember that."

For a moment they stared into each other's eyes. Radstock, cheap, vulgar and greedy, had fallen away into momentary nothingness,

and the shadows from outside the house seemed to creep close to the windows as though to listen, standing suspended in a tense moment, which passed like a flash, as Quentin walked through the door and went along the passage into the hall, and on up the wide, shallow steps of the staircase.

"What do you think of him?" Radstock asked, looking white and pallid in contrast to his wife. He was evidently anxious to know her mind, and spoke in an apologetic and nearly diffident tone of voice.

The bangles on her arms clashed as she made a movement with her hands. "I have never trusted a man with brown eyes," she said moodily. "I expected something different."

"So did I," he agreed, "but Dillon will do."

"That girl likes him." She shot a look at Radstock. "I haven't told her anything yet."

"I shouldn't." He turned off the lights and they went back to the untidy lair at the front of the house. "Time enough if she plays the fool. You may not like Dillon, Mildred, but he's going to pull the chestnuts out of the fire all right; it's the girl I'm doubtful about."

"Leave her to me," Mrs. Radstock said firmly. "I can manage her."

"I know." He lighted a stump of a cigar and they sat one on either side of the table, looking at each other silently.

THE drawing-room was wide and filled with a jumble of furniture. Small carved tables, an upright piano covered with draperies, its back to the room, and chairs of many sorts and sizes filled the place to overflowing. Bead curtains hung before the doors and tinkled as Dillon passed through them, and the plaster walls were decorated with fans and a silk dado in antiquated Victorian taste. Outside, the fireflies danced over the palm trees, and one or two even penetrated into the drawing-room, sparkling faintly against the walls. No cooling breeze came in from the night outside, and the lamps drew hosts of winged creatures towards their light.

As he came into the room, Marion turned and rose to greet him. She looked wonderfully fair in a black evening dress, and her hair shone in the light like gold. Her grey eyes were full of welcome, and in the room so ill-suited to her as a background she stood up like a tall white lily, as Quentin bowed himself before her in spirit.

" You ? " she said with a soft laugh of pleasure. " I am glad you have come. It is rather strange in this house."

" Shall we go on to the veranda ? " he

suggested, and they walked out together and leant on the wide rails. "If there was only a sea running below us, it would be like the *Thebaw's Queen* over again."

"The *Thebaw's Queen* seems ages ago already," she said half sadly. "I'm in the blues, and feel that the world is all a fleeting show."

"How do you like Aunt Mildred?" he asked.

"She has been very kind." Marion dwelt on the word. "Already she has spent a small fortune on me in clothes, for it appears that I am to be made a social success. I like clothes—naturally—but I don't like being given quite so many all at once. It takes one's breath away."

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yes, heaps of other things, only I don't want you to go off with the idea that I'm a temperamental grumbler. Frankly, I can't bear my uncle. I went for a drive with him round the lakes, and before we got in I would have exchanged him for a chimpanzee out of the Zoo."

"Wasn't he—what did he do?" Dillon asked fiercely.

"Nothing really. He had no need to. I am sure he is a liar, for he can't look you in the face, and I don't like his friend Mr. Nesbit who came with us."

Dillon said nothing, he only drew a long breath.

"As for my aunt, when you get over her looks, I think she is rather attractive—oh yes, she is—" she stopped him as he was about to reply. "But I am a wretch to talk as I do of them, seeing what my position is in their house. What puzzles me most is this"—she bent forward and talked in a carefully-lowered voice. "I told you that Aunt Mildred spent a small fortune on clothes for me. When next you see me I shall be most desperately smart, so far as Rangoon can go; but all the same, if you won't think me hopelessly vulgar for saying it, I do not believe that they are immensely rich. The house is hardly furnished, beyond that terrible drawing-room, and the garden is only a beautiful wilderness. There seem to be a lot of servants, but very queer, unsatisfactory creatures, and I feel as if I was living with people who are keeping up a pretence all the time."

"Why do you think so?" he asked.

"I can't tell. One knows these things instinctively. At home we never pretended anything, and here I feel"—she gave a tiny shiver—"that it may be that it is better to pretend."

"And they are kind to you?" he said earnestly.

"Very kind. Uncle Rad, as he prefers to be called, is horribly kind. He tells me that I shall have a perfectly glorious time of it here, and that I shall be what he describes as 'a ball-room favourite.'" She laughed in spite of

herself. "Mr. Nesbit is also kind." A tiny pause followed the mention of his name, and then she spoke again with a sudden rush of words. "But what *are* we, Mr. Dillon? Some people know us and others certainly do not and, I should say, do not want to. We passed all the world as we drove round the lakes, and I came to the conclusion that we don't really belong to it."

"Perhaps there are several worlds," he suggested.

"Ah, yes, I think that is so," she replied. "And whatever you think of me for saying all this, you must not imagine that I mind. It is only curiosity."

"I don't misunderstand you." He longed to put his hand over the white little hand that lay so close to his own on the balustrade. "I was only thinking that it isn't going to be easy for you, Miss Keith."

"Home is so far away," she said sadly. "Except for you, there is no one I can speak my mind out to. Tell me of yourself. What have you done all day? I know that Uncle Rad went to see you. How did you and he get on?"

"Quite well. We understood one another, or, at any rate, I understood him, and he said I would 'do.'"

"I am glad of that," she said with an unmistakable note of thankfulness in her voice.

"Are you? And why?"

"Because you won't go away." Her hand

actually did touch his, but whether by accident or not, he could not tell, only a wild electric thrill went through him, and he held himself back with an effort. He longed so madly to take her in his arms and kiss her until her pale face was red under his lips ; and he felt the passion of his soul stir a response from her. But he only made some stupidly ordinary remark, and as he did so, the tinkling of the bead curtains warned him that they were about to be disturbed.

Mrs. Radstock came into the room and looked round her, not sharply, but with her steady, heavy gaze, as though it were piercing through the externals of what she saw rather than merely looking at the outside of things. At her coming, Marion's expression changed ; the wistfulness of the exile was hidden away in a moment as she went back into the room. It was only the tiniest straw, but as Quentin watched her it made him wonder whether it were possible that Marion Keith was already a little afraid of her aunt. If she were, however, she showed nothing of her feelings, and Mrs. Radstock put her hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder.

" You are dead tired," she said. " Don't stay up any longer. Mr. Dillon is going at once." There was something at once subduing and chilling in her voice and manner, and Quentin felt his own disadvantage. Mrs. Radstock was going to be his foe where Marion was concerned ; his " lady sweet and kind " must have felt it

also, for she smiled at him as though trying to offer him consolation for her aunt's rather abrupt dismissal. She was a little depressed in spite of her smile, he could tell that.

"I suppose I am tired," she said. "I have done more in one day than I used to do in a year. Good night, Mr. Dillon."

Mrs. Radstock, still with her arm across Marion's shoulder, took her to the door and so intercepted any chance of touching hands or exchange of glances. On the whole, she did it well.

"My niece," Mrs. Radstock said, coming back from the jangling curtains, "is in my charge." She said nothing more, and gave no explanation of any kind, but her eyes were quite sufficiently expressive to inform Quentin of all that she deliberately left unsaid.

When he had left the house, Quentin thought steadily of Marion Keith's aunt. She was formidable, and her hawk-like nose, and sharp, observant eyes gave her a curiously cruel effect. Not for a moment did he believe in her inferred affection for the girl, and the very fact that she clothed her rough abruptness in a cloak of kindness, did not in any way hide the realities of the situation. Everything Marion had told him only increased his uneasy suspicions, and it jarred unspeakably to think that she was placed in such an equivocal position. The Radstocks were likely to be suspect in the eyes of their world, and Quentin pictured occasions upon which Marion would suffer from the small

slings and arrows hurled at her by a limited community, who would only regard her as "one of the gang." He was positive that Marion was to be exploited, and that in some way she entered into the calculations of her aunt and uncle.

As for himself, he was powerless to do anything, at least for the present. The recklessness with which he had exchanged identities with Dillon had given him no time to make inquiries as to what he actually did inherit when he undertook to play the part. Dillon might have been a forger or a thief, he might—though he certainly didn't look like it—have committed murder. There was no saying what he might or might not have done. Radstock had made no bones about it that, in any case, Dillon was down and under if exposure followed upon the rather risky game in which they were all engaged. In fact the air was thick with menace, and Quentin admitted that he did not like the look of things in the least.

Radstock alone, or backed by Nesbit, was not really formidable, because Quentin understood how to tackle men, but the addition of Mrs. Rad complicated things. To fight her meant a battle of wits, and besides, there was no use alarming Marion, who knew nothing of the facts. She believed that her aunt was kind, and that her uncle, at any rate, meant well. What end would be gained by putting her on her guard and spoiling any peace which might exist for her so long as she believed in them?

The moonlight played hide and seek with the black shadows of the palms and the darkness of the towering teak trees, and all the magic of the tropic night was around him. The hour was late, and time moved onwards, for good or ill, as the wind was swinging the bells that hung in a little pagoda at the end of Tank Road into music.

As he regained the town once more, everything was still awake and alive ; trains were crowded with flower-like Burmese girls and a quantity of Eurasians dressed in European clothes, and in the cafés people still collected, enjoying life after their own fashion. It was all like a stage setting, and made only a background for a curiously lonely little drama. Into the gorgeous and vivid picture he and Marion Keith had been swept by the strangest side-wind of fate, and they were going to be linked further by circumstances, the trend of which he could only guess. The paper lanterns along Hong-Kong Street were gay, and a wedding party was taking place in one of the noisy houses where the sound of singing came out into the air. They were real people, though they brought no sense of reality to Quentin Dillon, and more and more he began to feel that the isolation of the circumstances was complete. The Europeans who lived in the big, magnificent houses behind brilliant gardens and green-painted jinmills would know nothing of them, except as figures in local gossip, and the second-rate, rather doubtful set into which Mrs. Radstock might

have pushed her way by sheer force, would only stand very wide indeed if difficulties arose. They would both be branded by their associates from the outset. It gave him added nearness to her, but he would have forfeited any advantage of such a kind to know that Marion had at least one friend who might be trusted.

She had no one but him, and Quentin smiled rather bitterly when he considered that he was probably the darkest Ethiopian and the most murkily-spotted leopard of the whole collection. His past, of which he knew nothing, was damning, and there was no use attempting to explain things yet.

He walked into the Palm Hotel, and caught a glimpse of Nesbit through the open doors of the bar. Once more he was struck by the loudness and the handsome vulgarity of the man. He was entertaining some chosen friends, and when he saw Dillon he shouted to him to join them.

With his easy, careless walk, Quentin came towards them, not hurrying himself in any way, and Nesbit introduced him to his companions. Lomax, a dark, hardy-looking individual, with coal-black hair and pinched features, with a kind of surface buoyancy, which forced him to break into song at intervals, and made him use curious and unpleasant forms of oaths with which he deliberately peppered his remarks. He was in charge of a district somewhere up the river, and had leave to spend and money to burn. It appeared that he was a

married man, and regarded the fact as a joke, when he did not allude to it as a misfortune. Nesbit's other companion was called "Suffy," and was a person of importance, as his father held a high official position on the Lieutenant-Governor's Council, so that he was very much in the "inner set." He was in the Commission, and, so far as Quentin could judge, spent a great deal of his time in Rangoon.

On the whole, Dillon preferred him to the others. There was some touch of grace in his rather ineffectual personality, and his pale blue eyes and fair hair lent him a suggestion of belated boyishness. He was going bald very young, and had a turn for dissipation which already gave him an ugly puffiness around his eyes, and he evidently considered Nesbit and Lomax to be splendid fellows. They deferred to him in a way which flattered his vanity, and listened to his lies with attention. They acclaimed him as a "sportsman," and he talked of his father with a freedom and liberty of criticism which delighted his hearers.

Quentin summed him up as he stood drinking his long iced peg slowly. The type was by no means unfamiliar. Jack Rutherford was one of those weaklings who enjoy life with an artless verve, and love low things as some men love art or music. He hated to be alone, and needed the applause of his fellows, and some twist in his nature prevented him from being honest. He never paid his debts, and bragged of it, taking pride in the fact, and Hansara, his

district, was the most completely ill-managed in Burma. Insignificant, cheery and raffish, he accepted Dillon with a touch of condescension, and stared at him with his wide, blue eyes.

"Any friend of Nesbit's is a friend of mine," he remarked, and he ordered drinks all round.

"He's just left Government House," Lomax explained, "and feels rather on the weary side, don't you, Suffy?" and then he explained that "Suffy" was so called because of his habit of remarking "*Ça me suffit.*"

"I'll tell you what I intend to do," Rutherford said. He had got to the stage of intoxication when he wished to explain everything in careful detail. "I intend to get the girl invited to Government House. My mother can see to that. She knew Lady Smythe when she was only Mrs. Smith, and she can pull strings."

Nesbit nodded and looked at Lomax. "That's an idea," he said.

"I tell you," Rutherford went on, "I took a fancy to her, I really did. She's awfully good form. I can't think how Mrs. Rad managed it—her niece, too—if that's anywhere near the truth. I won't have you keeping her to yourself, Nesbit; there ain't many girls in Rangoon . . ."

"And they've all turned you down," Lomax said, dancing a few steps on the floor and laughing immoderately. "Poor old Suffy; but you aren't lonely, all the same."

The joke seemed an excellent one and a

chorus of laughter followed it, while Dillon sat down in a long chair and remained silent.

"We're speaking of a certain Miss Keith, whom you may not have heard of," Lomax explained. "Suffy, with his usual ardour, is in love with the lady. Nesbit got a start, because he knows Mrs. Rad and she likes him so much; he'll help us out if he can."

"Dillon isn't interested in skirts," Nesbit said carelessly. "Anyhow, Miss Keith is charming—quite charming." He looked like a satisfied pasha as he spoke. "I don't mind introducing her to you, Rutherford, because I'd like her to have a really good show here, and Mrs. Rad can't do very much where society is concerned."

They were indulging in all the exuberance of self-betrayal, and from his long chair Quentin Dillon wondered at them. Suffy was intolerably garrulous and loose of tongue, Lomax crafty and sly and the most unashamed of toadies, Nesbit conscious always of a hidden fear that his dignity was not sufficiently respected. None of them had the remotest idea of the value of reserve, and they proclaimed themselves in their speech. Out of their own mouths came their condemnation. Had Quentin been likely to harbour any illusions as to what they were, they would have disillusioned him as they pursued their coarse inanities with noisy gusts of laughter, stalking nakedly unashamed before the eyes of the man who watched them quietly and kept himself aloof.

" You aren't saying much," Rutherford said when the conversation languished a little. " I expect you're one of the silent sort."

" He hasn't got the hang of things yet," Nesbit explained. " Only arrived to-day. Lucky fellow, he is on his own, with nothing to do."

Lomax pricked up his ears. " Globe trotting ? " he asked.

" By Jove." The immediate inference that Dillon was a rich man made him deferential, and he offered to take him round. " You must have a good time."

" I'll take you up to Government House," Rutherford said. " It's as well to write your name in the book, and you'll probably get invitations."

" He ought to, certainly," Lomax remarked, and Nesbit said nothing. The fact that he was not on the Lieutenant-Governor's entertainment list was a sore point with him, so he swaggered with his elbows and remarked that " as an innkeeper " he could not expect to be acceptable.

" It's the old idea," he said loftily ; " they bring it out from England, that a gentleman mayn't do certain things. For myself, I stick to it that a gentleman can do anything—dam' well anything."

" Absolutely," Lomax agreed, and Suffy was of the same mind as the others.

It was very late before Dillon got to bed, and he had further food for thought. His

galère was a dreadful one, and he saw that he must watch himself carefully or he would find that they resented him. If they had the smallest suspicion that he looked upon them with contempt, he would be ostracised, and unable to carry on the pretence of good fellowship. Lomax was a cheap creature, and would be easy to dupe ; Rutherford, for all his weakness and obvious viciousness, was better than he, and was rather a pigeon than a hawk ; only Nesbit of the trio stood out as something worse than the rest because he had energy. If he were to be of any use to Marion Keith he knew that he must keep his anger in subjection. They could not really harm her any more than a gang of street urchins could defile the palace of a queen by throwing mud at the walls.

MARION KEITH, having come out of a land where everything was covered with the magic of rainbow mists and dreams, felt very much as though she had exchanged the past for a new life, and that all which had been so familiar might easily have happened centuries before she was re-born.

She was woman enough to know that her new clothes made her much more beautiful in an obvious way, and that the very contrast between herself and her surroundings added to the quality of her charm. But behind the change she was really in no way altered. From the moment when she had wandered into the picture gallery and carried out of it with her, not the remembrance of paintings hung on a wall, but the clear recollection of Quentin Dillon's lean, clever face and blazing eyes, she seemed to have awakened from her dreams. He had marked the turning point, and from that day onwards her life had become active rather than passive.

Adventures are to the adventurous, even though the majority of human beings believe that an eventful life exists only in the imagination of novelists who depend upon thrills for the success of their stories. Marion Keith did

not suggest melodrama. Her beauty belonged to the exclusive and not the exotic type ; she was flame-like in the sense that a diamond is full of fire, and if you took off her silk stockings you might expect to find golden Mercury wings on her small heels. Her face was like a flower, and there was always a suggestion of things sweet and natural about her, and behind the very fragility of her charm there lay the promise of deeper forces. Her life had been a life apart, and had not armed her for a conflict, or for a battle-field where people stabbed, grabbed and jostled one another, nor had she yet suffered. The pain of parting with the old things had been tempered for her by a youthful desire to experience something new, and she was still so much interested in the vividness of it all that fear had not touched her, or doubt — beyond a questioning sense of having come into close contact with lives which were not lived on the surface. Life turned no menacing face towards Marion Keith in the first weeks of her stay in Rosemary Villa, and she stood there happily enough, greeting the future with a smile.

Mrs. Radstock, with her dark face and occasional attacks of heavy, silent gloom, had been consistently kind to her. Sometimes she watched her niece with a curiously intent expression, and she had been pleased with the transformation which the clothes she had chosen worked upon Marion. She was given, at times, to bitter outbursts of anger towards the ruling

elements of Rangoon society. Lady Smythe, wife of the Lieutenant-Governor, ignored her, and neither she nor her husband were invited to even the most rag-tag parties held inside the grounds of Government House. She explained to Marion as they sat in the gaunt dining-room with its open doors, ragged, weather-stained blinds tempering the fierce light, that Lady Smythe was herself not received in London society. She was a short, painted woman, with a complacent husband, and the scandal of her *liaison* with a high official had been overlooked, chiefly because Sir Wilfred Smythe had so sedulously condoned it. As the price of his condonation, he had been pushed into place and power with the combined forces of his wife and the high official behind him, so that from Smith he had become Smythe, and from running a good chance of mouldering in an up-country station, he was now lord of all he surveyed. Lady Smythe put on insufferable airs, and as the *liaison* was now a thing of the past, she sat in the most vindictive judgment upon the rest of the world.

It was therefore a surprise to Mrs. Radstock when a red-coated *chuprassi* came to her doors with a large gilt-edged invitation card, which informed her that Lady Smythe and the Lieutenant-Governor were desirous of her company and that of her husband and Miss Keith, at a ball to be given at Government House.

"If she has been rude to you, Aunt Mildred, of course we shall not go," Marion said, tilting

up her chin. She had the clan feeling which even threw its mantle over her uncle, for whom she had no liking at all.

Mrs. Radstock frowned heavily at the card. "Jack Rutherford is at the back of it," she said. "Mrs. Rutherford knows too much about Lady Smythe. All the same, it might be well to accept." She signed the book, and the *kitmutgar*, who was waiting by her elbow, fled rapidly from the room.

"But we *cannot* go," Marion repeated. Her ears were still tingling from stories of slights heaped upon Mrs. Radstock, and she was astonished to think that anyone who looked so determined as her Aunt Mildred could waver in the face of so particularly cheap a bribe.

Evidently Mrs. Radstock did not intend to argue the question, as she called in her harsh voice for the *khansanah*, who usually appeared at that hour with his account book, and his coming inevitably heralded a furious quarrel in fluent Hindustani.

She felt that what her aunt had said of Jack Rutherford was probably true. That garrulous and sentimental young man had made his appearance at Rosemary Villa very shortly after her arrival, and there was no doubt why he came there. He had nothing to recommend him in the eyes of Marion Keith, but her uncle appeared to encourage his visits and was sickeningly deferential to him, and Mrs. Radstock treated him with a touch of warmth.

He was less objectionable than Nesbit, who

came and went frequently, and also than Lomax, who had attempted to make love to Marion the first time he found himself alone with her.

As she reviewed the habitués of Rosemary Villa, she shuddered slightly. They had all one fundamental likeness, and that was that they showed not the smallest deference towards anyone in the house. Rutherford spoke with contemptuous familiarity to her uncle, and laughed at Mrs. Radstock ; Nesbit ordered the servants about as though he were in his own house ; and Lomax did not trouble to use his better manners which he assumed whenever he felt himself to be with his social superiors.

Why was it ? she asked herself. Was it because of something they had done, these unknown relatives of hers, or was it their poverty ? Yet they entertained in a way which seemed lavish to her unaccustomed eyes. Very few women came to the house at all, and they were all too obviously second-rate. She had sat inwardly scornful and outwardly shy in the midst of talk which she thought futile and vulgar, and suffered to feel that her aunt, for whom she had a sincere liking, played down as readily as her uncle, directly they were in public together. The women Mrs. Radstock invited, though only very occasionally, it was true, were a form of window dressing, faded and cheap, but put there to create the impression that the company at Rosemary Villa was not wholly masculine.

She wandered out into the veranda, and

looked at the maddening glories of the garden, with its furious wealth of flower and beauty, and she thought of Quentin Dillon. He was not among the welcome guests of the house, and when he came there another change took place. Uncle Rad grew lofty and even hectoring in his demeanour, and Mrs. Radstock froze into silence. The one person whom they could afford to crush or exhibit a contempt towards, was the last man who suggested such an attitude.

Marion compared him inwardly with Nesbit—flushed, common and domineering—and the shadowy Rutherford who followed her like a dog. Lomax seemed beneath any comparison. Amongst these Quentin stood out clearly, his flaming personality and his unimpeachable looks and breeding marking him of another order. Yet they did not trouble to show the least civility towards him, and Mrs. Radstock discouraged his visits to the house. She appeared to regard his coming at all as a piece of effrontery, and Marion wondered whether her uncle's "business" was derogatory, but even if it were, they were partners.

Her uncle had looked at him with undisguised animosity ; Marion had caught the look and remembered it. Radstock's moist, whisky-reddened eyes were never specially pleasant. But when Quentin had come there to dine, Rutherford bringing with him a pallid young man who was His Excellency's secretary, Dillon had been treated again to an entirely different attitude on the part of his host and hostess.

They had disguised their usual lack of courtesy under a show of effusion, and Quentin had to all intents and purposes become the guest of the evening. Rutherford had brought Bates with him—uninvited—with the airy casualness with which he usually treated Mrs. Rad, and Bates had behaved as though he conferred a favour by being there at all, though he evidently liked Dillon, whom he appeared to regard as being on his own level.

The more Marion thought of it all, the more completely puzzled she became. She had not succeeded in getting a single word alone with Quentin since the evening of her arrival, and she longed to ask him for his explanation of the mystery. Why also did he accept the treatment meted out to him—the rudeness of her aunt, and the insolent familiarity of Radstock ?

The morning stretched out before her, and she had nothing at all to do. The emptiness of her life weighed upon her, as she looked ahead at the vacant hours. Something was in progress in the house, for two rooms on the further side were being brushed out by the sweeper, and appeared to be in process of being set in order, and she wandered round the deep paved veranda and looked in. She saw the tables covered with green baize, and the roulette boards, and ignorant as she was of the paraphernalia of a gambling room, she realised at once what the rambling quarter of the house contained, and then her eyes fell on the pictures with which

the walls were adorned, and, flushing to the roots of her hair, she turned away.

A sick sense of disgust swept through her, and a sudden longing to get clear away from it all. Her uncle had always been a wretched creature in her eyes, and now he appeared intolerably smirched, and when she thought of her aunt her confidence waned and wavered.

No wonder that they were all outcasts, and that decent society repudiated them. It was awful to feel that she made one of such a group. She stood very still, and thought with tense concentration. Ever since she came there, men had come to the house without appearing to be on at all intimate terms with the Radstocks, and she had taken very little heed of them. She knew that in the East hospitality was an old-established tradition. The regular visitors were Nesbit, Rutherford and Lomax—she could not count Dillon in any such list. Sometimes the men who came to Rosemary Villa dined at the house, and sometimes she and her aunt and uncle were alone, but even then she had heard voices talking in the veranda, long after she was in bed, and concluded that nocturnal visits were part of the social habits of Rangoon.

She was able to pass away quickly from all this. But what held her frozen was the sudden recollection that Dillon was in partnership with her uncle, and that he must therefore both know and profit by having a share in running the horrible place. It was hateful to think

such things of him, and her eyes were hot and strained.

Footsteps came along the veranda, and Mrs. Radstock hurried round the corner of the house to where Marion stood. She must have read the girl's face in a flash, for she spoke at once.

"I see you have been in your uncle's rooms," she said, tightening her colourless lips. "Probably it has shocked you, but there is no reason for you to be shocked. If you knew men as I do, Marion, you would not even be surprised." She drew her away, slipping her arm through that of Marion. "They gamble there, in a friendly way, and I may as well tell you at once that I dislike it intensely."

Marion Keith's sympathy towards her aunt was expressed in her grey eyes as she looked at the harsh, rugged face of the older woman. "Can't you stop Uncle Rad?" she said, and Mrs. Radstock laughed, and her laugh was far from pleasant.

"There, there," she said, patting Marion's arm. "I would have kept it from you, child. However, now that you have found it out for yourself, you can enter a little into my own difficulties, and help me when you can."

"If only I could."

"When the time comes, I am sure that you will."

Mrs. Radstock went back into the house, and said no more.

But in spite of her aunt's words, Marion felt

a deep revulsion of spirit. A thousand small incidents, hardly noticed at the time, came back to her, and all the fancied security of her life trembled and wavered. She was strained and anxious as she sat down in a long chair and pressed her hands over her face. What were they all indeed, what were they? No wonder that the men who came so casually treated them as they did; in the fuller light of revelation she wondered that they had not behaved rather worse. Her uncle's house was a gambling den, and the women who came there were of the kind which Suffy Rutherford had described as "the semi-demis," or "not yet caught outs." She had overheard him saying this to the thin-lipped, sneering Bates, and the point of his remark had entirely escaped her. Now it returned to her, and she flushed crimson at the inference. But she was there and could not escape. Rosemary Villa was her home, and her allegiance was instinctively towards her Aunt Mildred. Even if Mrs. Radstock lent herself to her husband's plan of making money in such a dubious way, she still seemed, in the eyes of her niece, a tragic and even dignified figure.

The glare of the garden smote her eyes, and she longed to get away from it, so she went into the house and put on her topi, standing before the long mirror in her room, looking at her own reflection. Already she thought that she looked changed and older, as though the passing of an hour had marked its heaviness around her eyes.

She went out of the garden, down the moss-grown steps and through the wrought-iron gate, following the road past the entrance to the Shwey Dagone. Huge plaster dragons with gaping mouths and vermillion-red tongues grimaced at her from the green slope where they were ranged, leading to the brown, fretted roofs that covered the ascent of a thousand steps. The little Burmese women called to her cheerfully as they sat surrounded by baskets of roses and orchids, selling them to pilgrims who desired to acquire merit by placing them before one of the hundred shrines on the plateau up above, where the *Gautama* in countless reproductions brooded in eternal peace under the shadow of the golden *Htee*. What use for her to climb the steps? she asked herself. The Buddha was far away in Nirvana, and cared nothing even for his own butterfly children to whom worship was a kind of game. She bought a handful of roses and a magenta prayer flag, and carried them away with her. Up on the plateau, the wind-blown flame from amber tapers, and the grey curling smoke of little joss-sticks, mingled in the air, but no Oriental splendour could bring comfort to Marion Keith.

She longed unutterably for the grey skies and acid green of her own country, for the sight of purple mountains and the fitful glories of distant skies, where the whistle of green plover came mournfully on the austere air. The intoxication of so much scent and colour only distressed her, and she took her way, not caring where she

went, along a narrow kennel, which led her finally into a wide street near the river.

A building at the further end attracted her eye, and for a moment a sense of pleasure revived in her. The roof was a mass of sea-green mosaic work, dragons with staring glass eyes coiled upon it, with delicate fins, ivory teeth and claws. Houses, ships and bridges were placed at intervals, like a child's playthings, all exquisitely proportioned, and heavy stone pillars upheld the long portico which stretched the full length of the building, a paper lantern, like a burned-out moon, hanging between each space. It was a Joss-house, she supposed, and with a faint awakening of curiosity she walked up the steps and went inside.

Within, the building was vast and lofty, and great gold and black pillars divided it into aisles. In the centre, a tank was sunk into the floor, surrounded by pots of plants, and at the end furthermost from Marion a great rose-red curtain was drawn, hiding the wall. On a square of white marble a green china jar held one scented joss-stick, which burned with a dim red spark, winking like a drowsy eye, its thin spiral of smoke losing itself in the arched roof above her head.

Life, with its smallness and pettiness, fell away from her as she stood there, and the immemorial greatness of a united Power behind it all, showing a different face to different races, uplifted her for a moment. She thought

of the little church at Ramelton with its windows set with diamond-shaped panes of glass; and square pews upholstered with red rep cushions ; the smell of dust and mildew that hung there, and the wheezy old harmonium, played by Miss Loftus, who was nearly as permanent as the church itself. How far away it all seemed now, yet in her fancy she could hear the crude voices of the choir singing with dragging intentness :

“ O Paradise, O Paradise, the world is growing old.”

She had left those days far behind her now, and she was still suffering from the shock of having discovered to what strange places her destiny had led her. The quiet life had gone, and in its stead she found herself isolated and alone in a world of horrifying possibilities. How horrifying they were, she had not yet entirely fathomed, but the menace of the future hung over her like a dark cloud.

For a time Marion sat in the empty Joss-house in the coloured twilight of the atmosphere, and her despair lightened a little. As she saw things, she was bound to a loyal adherence to her Aunt Mildred. Her aunt was of her own house, and though she seemed strong and even domineering, it was clear to Marion that she was at the mercy of circumstances. It was an hour of extremes and exaggerations in feeling for Marion Keith, and her sympathy outran her repulsion. A current of fore-ordained evil was

setting towards her, and the worst part of all was to know that Quentin Dillon had a share in the traffic of her uncle's house.

At length she rose and walked to the door, and as she gained the clamorous glare of the day outside, her dazzled eyes caught a glimpse of a car passing in the street below the steps. Dillon was sitting in it, in the driver's seat, and beside him Lomax was lying back luxuriously. In the back of the car a woman, dressed in the most atrociously bad taste, sat next to a vapid-looking young man, whom she recognised as Lord Amesbury, who was passing through Rangoon. Marion knew the woman, she was Mrs. Garrat Synd, who lived at the Palm Hotel, and of her husband, Suffy Rutherford had said that he was "more sinned against than sinning."

Quentin in that *galère* was no better than the rest, she told herself furiously. She must cast all thought of him out of her heart. She would be staunch in her adherence to her Aunt Mildred, and in any case, whither could she turn, and what else could she do? She was surrounded by closed doors.

There are times when the bravest heart feels daunted, and the most courageous spirit is suddenly lonely and desolate; and Marion Keith lacked neither courage nor resourcefulness. But she was very young and very unhappy, and as she looked around her world she did not find a single friendly face, or if there were friendly

faces, it only made matters worse, seeing that such falseness lay behind.

With weary steps she retraced the streets to the house, cold and sick at heart amid all the wealth of colour and glory of blossom around her.

As the date of the ball at Government House drew near, Mrs. Radstock spoke of it again to Marion. It had been decided that she was to go with her aunt, but Uncle Rad was, as he said, "not a dancing man," and preferred to stay away. Marion believed in her own heart that he funk'd it, and that, in spite of the fact that he constantly spoke of the Lieutenant-Governor and his wife with contempt and no little coarseness, he preferred not to risk a personal encounter with either of them. Quentin Dillon, whom she had avoided carefully, was going to be at the ball, having received an invitation because Lord Amesbury, who had attached himself to Dillon, said he wouldn't go without him, and Bates, the Lieutenant-Governor's secretary, had wangled it for him in some fashion of his own.

Marion dressed herself for the event with less pleasure than she had ever felt at the prospect of a dance, yet all dances known to her, heretofore, would pale into complete insignificance beside the gorgeous display which was to unfold before her eyes that night. She would have liked to wear one of her old dresses, but Mrs. Radstock was firm on the point, and came to her room to see that she actually adorned herself

in silver tissue and blue gauze, and with her golden hair waved for the occasion Marion hardly recognised her own reflection in the mirror on the wall.

"Put a little colour on your cheeks," Mrs. Radstock said, opening a small case which she carried, "and your lips, child, you look so white."

"Please don't ask me to," Marion objected.
"I never have, Aunt Mildred."

"Do as I tell you," her aunt said sharply, and a glance at her face informed Marion that she must decide whether or not the question was worth a row.

"Very well," she said mutinously. After all, it hardly mattered. She and her aunt were invited guests because Rutherford's mother had once been a go-between in the ugly, sordid old story of Lady Smythe's affairs with Lord Stenhaven, who was now doddering into a respectable grave. Dillon was going because he had reduced Amesbury to the condition of a friendly puppy, and was leading him on a string, whither he would. It was all of a piece, and if Marion herself was to look in keeping with the rest of them, what matter? She dashed on a dab of rouge, with a defiant hand, and reddened her lips a vivid carmine, turning to her aunt when she had done so.

"Shall I do?" she asked, and Mrs. Radstock nodded.

Nesbit was dining at Rosemary Villa, to keep her uncle company, and his temper was that of an

exasperated man. He spread himself largely through dinner, and spoke of his relations in England who wouldn't have condescended to know the Smythes if they had met in London. He accorded Marion a number of exaggerated compliments, and squeezed her shoulders, when he held her cloak for her, with a rough fury that startled her. He seemed to feel that she was closer to him than she had been, and just at the last he mentioned Dillon.

"It's a funny joke Dillon getting in there," he said with heavy sarcasm. "I'm not sorry either. When people who come from nowhere stick up their noses and put on airs, it serves them right. Dillon of all men! By George, it does make me laugh."

It also made Radstock laugh, for he rocked about in his chair and said that Dillon was "a corker," and "the blue limit," and various other things, adding that he couldn't help admiring his "neck."

"He's shaped much better than I thought," he said, and then he caught Mrs. Radstock's eye and relapsed into silence.

No one could have started out for a night's pleasure with more wretchedly disgusted feelings than Marion Keith, and she got into the hired carriage with her aunt, her shoulders still red from the pressure of Nesbit's gripping hands. She hated him actively now, and when the *kotchwan* had shouted at the horses and they started off with a jerk, she turned to her aunt.

"I can't stand much more of Mr. Nesbit," she said. "He is most offensive."

Mrs. Radstock appeared to be occupied with her own thoughts, but she turned to the girl, and her sombre eyes dwelt upon her. "I advise you not to offend him," she said coldly. "You are inexperienced, Marion, but you must understand that it is impossible for you to be on bad terms with your uncle's friends."

"Am I to swallow them all?" Marion asked.

"All," her aunt replied. "I quite see that it is awkward; as for Dillon, he matters very little; but Nesbit is"—she paused and appeared to search for a suitable word—"I should describe him as a rough diamond."

"I think you are very charitable." Marion gave a hard little laugh. "Is he to be allowed to make love to me?"

Mrs. Radstock patted her arm. "Oh, that . . ." she said carelessly. "When you know more of men, you will realise that any girl with a pretty face has to expect something of the kind."

They relapsed into silence as the carriage drove on and Marion stared through the window. Moving lights came along all the roads, and the feeling of suppressed excitement touched her in spite of herself, as the pace slackened and they followed in the wake of a long string of carriages and motors, all going to Government House.

The strong perfume of flowering shrubs hung in the air, and beside the tall gates the trees

were adorned to the very crest with thousands of Chinese lanterns, and the paths and walks were outlined with small lamps of coloured glass. In a strong bay of light at the entrance of the house a regiment of servants and orderlies waited, and people in evening dress passed onward up the red-carpeted steps.

With so many mixed feelings to contend with, the long, slow approach seemed interminable to both Marion Keith and her aunt, and when at last they arrived and the carriage came to a standstill, Marion would have given ten years of her life to have turned back and driven away again.

Inside the huge entrance hall, Bates and two A.D.C.'s urged congested groups of guests up the steps, which were flanked by native guards in brilliant uniforms, standing immovable as they held their lances stiffly and looked away over the heads of the surging, chattering crowd. Bates accorded only a very cursory politeness to his late hostess, but he touched Marion's arm as she passed, and told her to keep him a dance "like a good girl."

No one spoke to them in the cloak-room, where everything seemed a mass of flimsy satins and chiffons, white shoulders and jewels, but Marion realised that she and her aunt were a source of interest, for they were looked at curiously and with the appraising stare of polite hostility.

At the entrance to the great ball-room Mrs. Radstock grew nervous, and her evident lack

of self-confidence made its way to Marion's heart as their names were called out by Stretton, who pretended he had never met them before.

Light, colour and flowers were everywhere ; the blaze of uniforms and the glory of Oriental dress ; and near the entrance of the room, standing on a square of red carpet, the Lieutenant-Governor and Lady Smythe played the part of King and Queen. Lady Smythe hardly glanced at the advancing guests, and her husband stood at her side in his blue coat with gilt buttons, stoically blank.

"Sir Benjamin and Lady Hitch," Stretton announced in his full, resonant voice. "The Lord Bishop of Shanmerg ; Mrs. Radstock and Miss Keith."

As she walked to the red carpet, Marion saw that Jack Rutherford was standing a little to the back of the select crowd who were assembled on it. His place was on the carpet, and as she received the icy touch of Lady Smythe's fingers, she caught Suffy's eye and he smiled at her.

They passed on into the indifferent crowd which suffered rather than welcomed them, and Marion wished from her heart that she had never come there at all. Lady Smythe had practically ignored her aunt, and had deliberately turned away, according her not even the semblance of any welcome, and she herself had received very nearly the same treatment.

"Why should we stay ?" she asked in a

whisper, but Mrs. Radstock made no reply. She had seen a friend at last, and Mrs. Synd came towards them with the gushing enthusiasm of one who has nowhere else to turn. She screamed compliments at Marion, and laughed a great deal, saying that she hadn't a dance left as Lord Amesbury was a perfect wretch, and had appropriated almost every one.

"Lord Amesbury and Mr. Dillon," Stretton's voice rang out again, and in spite of herself an electric thrill ran through Marion, and she gripped her fan tightly.

Dillon, with a hint of passing amusement in his eyes, came across the floor with his rather silly-looking friend, and Lady Smythe, ignoring the string of guests behind them, talked with animation to them both, and at last, after what seemed an age, Dillon came straight to where Marion stood. He frowned as he looked at her.

"Why have you spoiled yourself?" he asked in a low voice. "You must go and wash it off."

"I shall not," she said, and met his eyes with a challenge.

"Are you going to dance with me? I can't dance, by the way," he went on, "but we could sit it out, and I will get a glass of water, and with a handkerchief you can become yourself again."

She wondered at his audacity. How dared he speak to her like that, when he was what he was?

"I shall not dance with you," she said

formally. "I may not have much choice left to me, but at least I can choose whom I shall dance with."

A flash of hurt impatience crossed his face. "You don't mean that?" he asked. "One dance. I'm not suggesting anything compromising."

The music of the band leapt into the air and the floor was being cleared, so that for the moment Marion was swept away from Mrs. Radstock. Mrs. Synd and Lord Amesbury were dancing together, and Jack Rutherford, accompanied by Bates, came to where they stood. For a second Marion hesitated, and then the memory of the Dillon whom she had known on the voyage out conquered, and she dropped her eyes.

"Then, one," she said. "There are things I would like to say to you."

Dillon scribbled his name on her programme and turned away, and a few minutes later Marion was dancing with Suffy.

The ball, when she looked back on it, was one of the most miserable experiences she had ever been through. Bates introduced her to a dozen men, who all seemed to regard her as fair game, and Stretton cut her dead because Lady Smythe's eyes were upon him. She went through a wretched performance with Amesbury, who had drunk too much champagne at supper and whirled her off her feet, refusing to stop, and calling the united attention of the guests to their mad prancing. Bates, white

and thin-lipped, drew her away to a sheltered place in the garden and, catching her hands, tried to kiss her. She was "a silly little girl," he told her, to pretend. Why not be amiable? He added that he would come to Rosemary Villa again, and that her uncle was a queer old reprobate. His insolence was worse than the sentimental overtures of some of the others, and, compared with the rest, Rutherford stood out as the only kind and considerate man she had met there that night. Of Dillon she saw nothing; he was, so Suffy told her, in the card-room playing bridge, and, as the night wore on, she longed with increasing trouble of heart for his reappearance.

" You are by far the biggest peach here," Suffy said with deep conviction. " All the other women are jealous. Why, they aren't fit to tie your boots. I'm not much of a fellow, Miss Keith, but I do hope you'll think of me as a friend." His eyes grew moist with feeling.

" I want a friend," she said sadly. " I think it was a mistake for us to come."

" Don't say that," he said anxiously. " Haven't you enjoyed it? Amesbury behaved badly, but all of us knew it had nothing to say to you."

" I have never met people like these before," she explained. " Lady Smythe was deliberately rude. Not that I care, but I wish we hadn't come."

" No one minds her. She's an old cat. Will

you believe me that I'd do anything in the world for you ? ”

They were sitting in an alcove at the end of the ball-room, and Marion saw Dillon come in from the further side. He looked round the room, searching for her, and Rutherford spoke again.

“ There's Dillon. I like him, though there are very queer stories about him.”

Dillon came towards her as they spoke, and Rutherford got up. “ I'll come back at the end of this dance and find Mrs. Rad,” he said reluctantly. “ That is, if you really won't stay.”

“ I certainly won't stay,” Marion said quickly, and Dillon sat down at the vacant place at her side.

“ My pound has gained ten pounds,” he said, smiling at her, “ and I worked hard. What have you been doing ? You look as though you'd—” he stopped as he scrutinised her face. “ Rather as though you wished yourself back home.”

“ Don't talk to me of home,” she said with a little quiver in her voice.

“ Tell me,” he asked, leaning forward, “ has anyone been annoying you ? Suffy hasn't ? ”

“ Indeed he has not,” Marion replied quickly. “ I like Mr. Rutherford.”

“ Then some one else has, or was it that idiotic woman, Lady Smythe ? Do you know, Marion,” her name came out quite naturally, so that he hardly noticed that he had called

her by it, "it really was rather a good joke. I had met her once before, at a dinner-party given by Stenhaven—oh, ages ago. Stenhaven is a relation of mine, not one of whom I am particularly proud."

Marion's eyes grew icy. As well as being a shady adventurer, Quentin Dillon, so it appeared, thought it worth while to lie to her so that he might possibly impress her by dragging in a titled relative. Once she had asked her aunt tentatively where Mr. Dillon came from, and the answer had been "the gutter."

"I don't remember that I ever said you might call me Marion," she said frigidly, and then, as ever, something indefinable about him broke down her defences. She could not hate him.

"I wish you would tell me what has happened," he said earnestly. "Don't imagine that I can't understand the damnable position you are in; only you must not do that sort of thing," he looked at her pink cheeks. Pink still in spite of the weariness of her body and mind.

"Why not?" she said defiantly. "If I choose to get as much fun as I can out of the situation, I really do not see what it has to say to you, Mr. Dillon."

"That is how you regard it?"

"Certainly."

He only looked at her steadfastly. Marion Keith must have been fighting hard, and her sword was still in her hand, she was intensely

sensitive or she would never have spoken like that.

"Then I shall say no more," he said quietly, as he noticed the young haggardness of her face and eyes. She was feeling things desperately with all the passionate revolt of her nature, and how was he to help her? Their short conversation had made real to him his position in her eyes, and his lady sweet and kind was hostile—no wonder that she was.

"Don't let us quarrel," he said fiercely. She made such a powerful appeal to his chivalry, situated as she was. He knew perfectly well, now, what sort of people she had come out to, knew the ugly reputation of Rosemary Villa, and that her aunt and uncle were tarred with the same brush. The girl whose face had come to him out of the crowd in the picture gallery and taken his eyes and his admiration, was set in a place where it would be easy for her feet to slip, and the hard red line of carmine on her lips seemed like a concession to the sordid vulgarity of her life. Did she intend to play up to the part expected of her? He could not believe it for a moment; you could trust her to walk through hell with her light, graceful step, and, because of some intrinsic whiteness of soul, to be able to ignore all she saw.

He thought of the first evening, when she had spoken to him of her fears and troubles, and now the open door of confidence was closed, part of the penalty for his mad act in changing identities with the other Dillon. Yet he did

not regret it. She was looking at him with her steady grey eyes, pondering some point in her mind, and he spoke again.

"Am I to be nothing at all to you?" The lighted ball-room grew dim before his eyes, he ceased to notice the noise and the laughter of the gay crowd, and, with his keen face set, he waited for her reply. The melody of the string band was beating out its flood of sentiment, recalling old memories, and making an obligato to new.

"I want something *real*," she said, with sudden vehemence. "A month ago, I believed in what I was told, and now I believe nothing." She made a despairing gesture with her hands. "How can I believe in you?"

Then she either guessed or had been told, he thought. "Why should you, indeed," he said gravely, "and yet, Marion, I love you, and I think you know it."

Marion drew back. She looked at Dillon's face and she did not answer, and then she remembered the room where men gambled at her uncle's house. She remembered the glimpse she had caught of Quentin driving with Amesbury and Mrs. Synd, and her heart turned to ice. He was good at pretence, and for some reason or other he wanted her to believe in him.

As she watched him, Rutherford came through an opening at the back and prevented the possibility of any further speech. He looked very much worried, and coming to where Marion sat he spoke to her.

"I have found Mrs. Radstock," he said apologetically. "She is in the carriage. Will you join her there, Miss Keith?"

Marion got up without speaking again to Dillon, and followed Rutherford across the room. Her head ached desperately, and she smiled mechanically at Bates, who waylaid her again, and reminded her that he still had her name down for a dance.

"I am tired," she said, too weary for further hostilities, "and am going home."

Several other men had joined the group, all noisily demanding that she should stay, so that Stretton, who had been standing beside Lady Smythe, advanced delicately and whispered to Bates. The suggestion that they were causing their hostess offence, was perfectly clear; and burning with shame, Marion went onwards, the way being open for her to leave.

"Mrs. Rad isn't in the best of form," Rutherford said as she rejoined him, having put on her light silk cloak. "I think I'll come back as far as Rosemary Villa, if you will not mind."

"Mind? I don't mind anything," she replied.

MRS. RADSTOCK had suffered from the isolation of her position during the evening, and was angry; and since anger demands an object, she turned a cold look upon Marion Keith as she got into the carriage, but when she saw that Rutherford intended to accompany them she softened perceptibly.

The night was scented with jessamine and syringa, and the maddening sweetness of acacia trees in heavy blossom, and in the dim light of coming dawn, Marion looked hopelessly through the window. The sense of helplessness was heavy upon her soul, and she knew that Suffy watched her with the eyes of a faithful dog. He was talking to Mrs. Radstock, and listening to her stormy outburst against Lady Smythe. Mrs. Radstock did not spare her late hostess, and her anger was mordant and bitter. The refrain of her complaint was that Lady Smythe was not really a lady, and that with a record such as hers, it behoved her to be less insolent to others.

Rutherford would have lingered in the veranda if Marion had given him any encouragement, but she hurried away to her room, longing for silence and peace.

But peace was not for her just then, and

when the ayah had gone off behind the curtain and through the door, her anklets tinkling, Marion heard a knock, and her aunt came in, gaunt, grey and haggard in the clear yellow light of the Eastern morning.

"I think that Rutherford means something," Mrs. Radstock said, sitting down on a chair in front of the dressing table. "He stands well in the Commission, with his influence, and you might do worse. I'm speaking for your own good, Marion."

"What do you mean, Aunt Mildred?" Marion had washed the rouge off her face, and was startlingly pale.

"I mean that it's a chance for you," She looked at the girl quite kindly as she spoke. "I know my world, and many of the men who will be glad enough to make you remarkable, won't want to marry you. You may not have noticed that Mrs. Synd is jealous already."

"Mrs. Synd," Marion said in accents of disgust. "I can't bear Lord Amesbury. He was drunk."

Her aunt took no notice of her. "I have only come here to tell you that if you want safety, Rutherford can give it to you." Mrs. Radstock got up, and drew her shabby black dressing-gown round her shoulders. "I can do very little. As we are, so you must accept us, for nothing will be altered. In your own best interests you should look for an establishment with the status Rutherford can give."

"But you said—or Mr. Lomax said, that

Mr. Rutherford . . ." Marion hesitated and flushed.

"Oh, the Burmese girl? That doesn't count," Mrs. Radstock made a gesture with her hands. "If you make a fuss about details of that kind, here in Burma, you won't find a husband." She looked sharply at Marion. "I saw that you were with Dillon just as we left. If you are so particular, Marion, I warn you that he isn't the man to accept on friendly terms."

"What is there against Mr. Dillon?" she asked, catching her aunt by the sleeve of her wrap. "Why is it that you and Uncle Rad speak of him as you do?"

For a moment Mrs. Radstock paused and seemed to consider her answer carefully, and then she spoke. "I prefer not to tell you—at present, certainly."

Marion watched her go, and cold waves of despair swept her. There had been the undeniable note of conviction in her aunt's voice. She was carried back to those first days of her friendship with Quentin, and thought of how, together, they had talked of the unknown life awaiting them both. She had accepted him open-heartedly and without reservation. His eyes were the eyes of an honest man, and he suggested no kind of falseness or intrigue, and yet he had never talked very much of himself, and not at all of his own past history. She had no thought for Rutherford; he mattered as little as the dust under her feet, the soft red dust of the Rangoon roads. It was of Dillon

she thought, the man whom she loved, against her own judgment, and she fought with herself for a clean memory of him. He had told her that he loved her, and she must not let herself think of him. If Rutherford seemed tarnished and damaged by his easy code of morals, how could Dillon stand exempt? At length she slept out of sheer weariness.

With the morning Marion had made her decision. She intended to cut off her offending hand. If Dillon came to the house, as she knew he would, she intended to avoid him. She was pledged to her aunt to help her as far as she could, and she intended to recapture what she might of the old freshness and gaiety which had escaped from her. The words came back to her, "'Tis but in vain, for soldiers to complain," and she managed to extract a great amount of comfort from them.

The idle, lazy days passed on, and the rains began to threaten, massing in heavy clouds over the Shan hills. All the mournfulness of a tropical climate when the sun is hidden, fell over the land, and the palm trees in the garden at Rosemary Villa swayed and tossed in the warm high wind. Low mist wraiths down the valley clung like cotton wool, and doors banged and windows rattled all through the house. The evenings grew dark early, and as Marion refused to face the Gymkhana Club, where she and her aunt were openly avoided, she was left a great deal to herself. Uncle Rad never went to any club, but he never lacked company, for a

string of men came perpetually to the house. The influx of casual guests had increased perceptibly, and Marion could only suppose that Dillon was the agent who brought them there. Mrs. Synd and the other *déclassée* women who whirled in the lower waters of Rangoon society, also came and were made welcome, though Amesbury had gone, leaving no trace of himself other than a set of rubies and a gold bag, which Mrs. Synd exhibited with a rather naïve pride.

By a process of steady avoidance, Marion kept more or less out of the mid-stream of her uncle's hospitality. Many of the men began by paying her quite unsubtle attentions, but finding they met with no response they forsook her for Mrs. Synd and her friends, who were more amiably inclined. Marion watched them with speculative eyes, and wondered at them. Mrs. Synd seemed to her so curiously futile, and her method lay in much use of her large brown eyes, and a habit of pinching people under the dinner-table. She had also an odd fashion of lacing her shoes, tying them at the toes instead of over her insteps. She was really nothing but a clumsy vulgarian with a good neck and shoulders and an eternally ready laugh. Her reputation for popularity was immense, and her talk *risqué*; she regarded Marion as a foe, chiefly because she was young, and very much better looking than herself, and she resented the fact that what she accepted with avidity, Marion did not appear to consider worth notice.

Outwardly, at least, the decencies were observed. Whatever might be said of Rosemary Villa, and much was said, Mrs. Radstock kept a sufficiently firm hand on the reins ; and though Bates had become a habitué, and was there with increasing frequency, Marion knew that her Aunt Mildred took some trouble to protect her from having to see him alone. He was always on the watch, and waylaid her in the veranda, if she came down earlier than the rest. But things were not standing still, and Marion knew that when the rains broke, and Rangoon was emptied of the big important people, Rosemary Villa became more and more the central meeting place for the less reputable. Bates had followed his Excellency and Lady Smythe to the hills, and so she was spared his attentions, but Nesbit remained, and bit by bit she realised that though her Aunt Mildred was prepared to defend her from Bates, she withdrew all shelter where Nesbit was concerned.

She deliberately refused to talk to Quentin Dillon, who accepted her attitude without complaint. He was there as often as any of those who came, and she knew that his dark eyes followed her even when she would not look in his direction.

Rutherford was for ever at her heels, and from time to time he hovered on the brink of an open declaration only fended off by Marion's steady refusal to give him any chance to speak. Though she held life at bay, surrounding herself with indifference, she knew that her defences

were deplorably weak, and Nesbit was, of all the rest, the one she most feared.

It was towards the end of the rains, while Rangoon steamed and sweated in the fierce return of a blazing sun, that events began to shape definitely. Suffy Rutherford had, with his usual skill, wangled a job at Government House, and was established there as an extra secretary. He brought his ponies with him, and he and Marion rode along the twisting paths that circled the lakes, the wind singing freshly in the feathery bamboos over her head. Riding with Suffy was very nearly the same as riding alone, and it gave her a better sensation of freedom. She and her aunt had ceased to hold anything in the way of confidential relations. Uncle Rad treated her to bursts of temper, and her position in the house became more and more complex. She was like a woman blindfolded by fate, and who must seek to know nothing, and the only echoes of events that came to her now that she had chosen to cut Dillon off, reached her through Rutherford's conversation. She had wit enough to know that so long as Rutherford danced his perpetual attendance upon her, her aunt believed that she would eventually show her good sense and marry him.

One exquisite morning, when the early sunshine gilded the trees and roofs and called out the colour of gorgeous blossom, Marion started from the gate of Rosemary Villa and she and Rutherford turned their ponies up the hill.

Marion had a distinct sensation that Rutherford intended to be confidential, and her wish to avoid confidences made her keep a little ahead of him.

"Stop and talk to me, Miss Keith," he implored her; "there is something which I must say."

She held back the bay waler who danced across the road out of sheer lightness of heart, and turned her head and looked at Suffy.

"I'm not in the least in the mood for confidences," she said, with a laugh. "What is it?"

"It's Nesbit," he replied seriously. "I'm afraid he'll give you a lot of trouble. He's not the right sort, and lately he's been drinking."

"I don't really care what he does," she said indifferently.

"You may not, but all the same I had to warn you. You see . . ." Rutherford paused and hesitated, "Nesbit talks."

"I suppose so." Still she was not interested. "So long as he talks to other people, I don't really care, as I said."

Rutherford thought for a moment before he spoke again. "He and Rad are partners. I'm not saying that there's anything special in that, but Rad will be on his side. We all gamble a bit—I do, and so do the rest." He seemed to feel a touch of depression as he spoke of it. "You're in danger," he went on anxiously. "I'm not thinking only of myself, indeed I am not."

They had reached a clear space on the high ground, and Marion looked back across the valley to where the two towers of the Cathedral, and the shining lance of the Shwey Dagone stood upwards in the exquisite colour of a blue day. A yearning for all she had left behind grew to pain in her heart, and her quiet girlhood went by before her eyes. She saw the high border of flowering herbaceous plants against the grey walls of the garden, the plumes of lilacs, and the flicker of beech trees in the sun. Ghosts of remembered faces trooped out and took life once more and called to her wistfully. It all seemed very far away, and now Rutherford said she was in danger, and that she was threatened by the coarse man who was proprietor of the Palm Hotel.

" You don't care for me ? " Rutherford asked in a low, grieved voice, and Marion shook her head.

" There's no reason why you should," he went on, " but even if you pretended, said you were engaged to me, I could protect you from Nesbit."

" You are very kind," she said, " because you mean it." Her eyes were turned to his quite frankly. She was struck with his suggestion of weakness. Even in this moment, which was for him a very poignant one, he had none of the boldness of decision. He loved her, but even his love was weak, and Marion, while she pitied him, also felt a touch of scorn. Did he really believe that he could fight her battles

and shelter her from the storm ? He looked apologetic, an attitude which no woman forgives easily in a man, and she felt her sympathy wane and evaporate. There are some men whom every woman in a sense treats badly, and the strongly feminine touch in Rutherford made Marion callous. He was suffering like a woman, too, for his eyes were full of tears, and when she rode away from the hill and he followed her, her most definite feeling was one of irritation.

And yet she softened a little as she rode up the gravelled path to the slovenly entrance of the veranda. She was hoping, in the mad way in which women hope, that Dillon might be there and might come out to meet her, but instead Nesbit swaggered along the flagged terrace, and with his topi pushed over his nose, greeted her with much familiarity.

"I've been having a drink with old Rad," he said, helping her down. "You look very delectable, Miss Marion," he squeezed her in his arms as she extricated herself angrily. "Breakfast's ready, by the smell of the curry, so trot along and don't take hours making yourself beautiful. You'll do as you are"; and then he turned to Rutherford and laughed at him, pointing at him with an extended arm and striking an attitude as though he had only then recognised him.

"Been to the Bunya?" he asked, "or won't they lend you any more, Suffy? You'll have

to cut some fellow's throat to turn your luck. They say that's the way to make sure of it."

"I'll cut yours," Rutherford said, without his usual good humour. "I'd like to do that whether it changed my luck or not."

WHEN Dillon left England, he had gone with the definite idea of experiencing sensations and tightening up his nerves until they could once more hum like strained telegraph wires. He could get this special sensation no longer through facing a hunter at an ugly fence, or sailing a yacht single-handed in a gale of wind, and he needed more of a wild uncertainty of what might be coming next to afford him any real zest in life. This was what he had asked for when he turned his back on his old associates, and he could not grumble because fate had refused to fulfil his demands.

He had already arrived at the state of mind which makes a man lie awake at night, wondering what the morning will bring, and with all the rest, he was desperately in love with his lady sweet and kind.

The deeper he went into the so-called "business" the more murky it appeared, and his first dislike of Radstock thickened up, as Quentin put it, into something closely akin to detestation. He played his part with a skill which surprised himself, and had very little pity for pigeons such as Amhurst who, he felt, deserved what they got. But the talk that he heard sickened him, and the better type of men who

went to Rosemary Villa were in the habit of pitying Marion Keith, while the others believed that she was merely clever, and had decided that she would hold out for a profitable marriage. Quentin could fight for her in a detached way, and at least the others knew better now than to discuss her in his hearing, but otherwise his hands were tied. As they could treat no one else to scorn, Radstock and his wife made the most of the fact that they knew him to be their inferior, and often it had cost him a fierce effort not to flame up into open revolt.

It had taken some time for him to realise that Nesbit "meant business," as he put it, and, of all people, he chose Quentin as his confidant. On the whole, he appeared to like Dillon in a condescending fashion, and when he had drunk rather more than he should have done, he even regarded him as a humble friend to whom he might talk.

"I'm thinking of doing something rather mad," Nesbit said one sultry evening as they sat in his room at the back of the Palm Hotel. His coat was hanging on his chair and his collar lay on the floor; for his attitude was *dégagé* and he looked more than usually ill-bred and highly-coloured.

"You are, are you?" Dillon laughed. The heat was never unkind to him, and even with the thermometer at 105°, he showed none of the trickly stickiness which affected his companion. "It seems to me that we're all pretty

mad as it is. One of these days Rad will come down and there will be an inquiry."

"Not it." Nesbit shook his head. "Not since Swimerton allowed his weakness for punting to conquer his damned superiority. If there were to be a row he'd be in it, and, to keep himself out, he's got to protect the rest of us."

Dillon shook his head. "I don't agree. You can't eat your cake and have it—Providence doesn't like that kind of thing. Something will happen."

Nesbit hummed between his closed teeth and returned to his first point. "I haven't told you what I'm going to do, Dillon," he said expansively. "It will come as a bit of a surprise to you. But I'm an independent cove—always was. I came out here and turned innkeeper, and I've never given a damn for public opinion. My own people won't know me"—he was so proud of this fact that he repeated the words—"actually won't know me, because they think such a hell of a lot of themselves, and it doesn't bother me much, and if they disapprove of my marrying, I don't care."

"Marrying?" Dillon raised his eyebrows.
"Who is it, if one may ask?"

Nesbit moved in his chair and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his white waistcoat. "I intend," he said, chewing the end of his cigar, "to marry Mrs. Rad's niece. Of course, I know all that can be said against it. There's talk about Rosemary Villa, a great deal of

talk, but I can afford not to care." He looked at Dillon quickly and his sandy eyelashes flickered. For all his boasting, it was evident that he was slightly sensitive on the point and rather anxious to see how his colleague accepted the announcement. Dillon's face expressed neither surprise nor admiration.

"Have you said anything to Miss Keith?" he asked at last.

"Why, no." Nesbit blew out a gust of smoke. "Not yet. All in good time. I have indicated to Rad that I mean business, and he is, naturally, very well pleased. She's rather in the way up there"—he jerked his thumb vaguely in the direction of Rosemary Villa. "Mrs. Synd and the others don't like her, and she turned down Bates too heavily. I'm not defending Bates, but it's awkward, and better for every one if she were out of it."

"In fact, you are an altruist?" Dillon suggested.

"Oh no, not that. I don't mind her airs—I'm used to airs at home; it decided me. She's quite right," he went on argumentatively; "why make herself cheap? She's got some sense, and I respect her for it."

"But you may not be the only one?" Dillon said with an added quietness of tone.

"You're alluding to Suffy? I expect he'll ask her to marry him, but he's pretty nearly ruined, Dillon." Nesbit's face changed and lost its contented smile. "I'm bothered about that. He ought not to play any more. I've

got a lot of information about him through Mones, the Eurasian clerk, and he says that Suffy's as rocky as Gibraltar."

"That doesn't alter the fact that——"

"He's after my girl?" Nesbit laughed loudly. "You can't set up house when you owe every dib you earn to the moneymenders, and even though socially he can make a better bid, I've got the ready, and I intend to take Ma Tin's house on the lakes. It's a fine place and good enough for anyone."

"There might be others." Quentin looked at Nesbit, and some of his dislike found its way into his eyes, so that once more the innkeeper of the Palm Hotel was moved to mirth.

"Well, I know one person whom it can't be, old fellow," he said heartily, "and that is William Quentin Dillon. You've got a wife already, as I happen to know. It amuses me," he leaned back again, "to think that you play the Duke so successfully, and to talk to you no one would dream the kind of cuss you really are. Upon my soul, there's times when I have to rub my eyes. Living here like a millionaire and pals with decent men when you might be asking for a ticket in the Sailors' Home, and glad not to be in a ruddy worse place."

Dillon lighted a cigarette. For a second he was stunned by the new discovery, and he thought again of Marion Keith. Did she know? Probably she did. And how in the intricate tangle of circumstances was he ever going to clear himself in her eyes?

"I won't say that I don't rather like you for it," Nesbit continued magnanimously. "I expected a seedy chap who would dress up to the part and get in with fellows who aren't over particular. I admit, too, that it's due to you that we've got the stunt running on a much bigger scale. Classy"—he drank, lifting his glass towards Dillon. "Positively classy. And all to some extent owing to a fellow who hasn't a shred of reputation. Your career gone to the dogs, no money, so far as we heard, and worried with family cares into the bargain. By Gad, I respect you." He paused to take breath. "How you get finances to run your car I haven't asked, and I don't intend to ask. Live and let live, that's what I say. But if you've let yourself admire Marion Keith, you'd better pull up short."

Quentin turned his eyes away and looked out through the open veranda into the night. The situation was so ridiculous in some of its aspects that he was close to bitter laughter. What sort of figure indeed did he cut, if you knew only the record of the man he had met at the Commercial Hotel?

"You don't want to talk about the past; quite," Nesbit said. "I understand that. Particularly the last episode. I'm not speaking of anything just to remind you of it, only to tell you that at times I could swear you had forgotten it yourself."

"I'd like to know how many do know all this," Dillon said slowly. "I expected to be treated squarely."

" So you have been," Nesbit slapped the table with an open palm. " Damned square. Beyond myself and Rad, which includes Mrs. Rad, no one else was told as much as a whisper. Couldn't be ; you see that for yourself, surely ? If it got out that you weren't quite as showy as you look, it wouldn't do. It's kept close enough, and will be unless you make trouble. Rad hates the sight of you, and he'd like to notify the police, but he won't. It's Swimerton over again, too much at stake to allow of it. Besides, I've taken to you, and I'll see that you don't get into the mud."

" As you appear to know more of my private affairs than I do myself," Quentin said, with assumed indifference, " perhaps you'd just run over the points most likely to get me into trouble over here ? "

Nesbit laughed. He regarded the subject as a good joke. " You are wanted in Johannesburg," he said, removing a long grey ash from his cigar, " that news came from Macmillan this mail. Mac is bleating like a sheep over it, and apparently his house is watched by narks, as they still suspect him of hiding you away. As for the woman, she's yelping, too, so Mac said, and raising hell. However, none of them know where you are, except Mac."

Dillon sat silent. Nesbit had cast a net of illusion about him, and he felt as though he was listening to some fantastic story told about some one else. He remained very quiet and looked down at his folded hands.

To nearly everyone there comes a moment in a lifetime when the whole extent of some preposterous folly spreads itself out complete under our stricken eyes, and we realise that under the influence of a momentary impulse, we have run on the rocks. The situation admitted of no escape, and the joke was an infernal one. There was no going back, and around him there towered walls built up by his namesake's past sins. Nesbit watched him with some surprise ; there was something deeper than silence between them just then.

"I will say," the innkeeper of the Palm Hotel went on, "you've done well. Bluffed like a good 'un. Bates looks upon you as an equal, and he's a supercilious blighter. You fooled Swimerton A1, and he actually thinks he knows your uncle a General." Nesbit slapped his leg and laughed. "It was as good as a play. You've been asked to stay with his Excellency and her damned Ladyship. Oh, it's one of the finest ramps of modern times. I tell you, if I didn't trust you to pull it through, I'd get nervy, only you've cheek enough for anything. A knock-out, you are."

"Yes, so I begin to think," Quentin agreed.

"But you haven't fooled Marion Keith," Nesbit went on. "She's not taking any. I've watched her, and I asked old Ma Rad if she knew. Ma Rad said she didn't, so there's *instinct* for you, old man." He got up and yawned as he looked out of the open doors of the veranda. "It's about time we moved along.

There won't be many up there to-night as there's a Masonic dinner going on, but enough to make things cheery."

They walked out into the street together, and through the Chinese quarter, taking their way up the hill, the stale sweet scents of the bazaar hanging in the air, and the gala effect of a lighted stage around them. Once more the sensation of unreality affected Dillon strangely. He felt that if he were to strike out with his fists, he could dispel it all like an illusion; amid the whole fantastic show, nothing whatever was real except his love for Marion Keith. The man at his side, who looked like a flushed and handsome butcher, intended, if he could, to marry Quentin's "lady sweet and kind," and that, too, could only be a kind of nightmare dream. Rangoon lay below them as they reached the gate leading to Rosemary Villa, with its mysterious fairy-tale wonder, and, as once before, Quentin was assailed by a realisation of the intense loneliness of his position and that of Marion Keith.

They entered the house by a door at the back, and took their places at the table where Radstock held the bank at *chemin-de-fer*. Swimer-ton, left in charge during his Excellency's absence, had come there under cover of the night, his dry soul bitter with the dust of Burma, and his eyes lighted with a gambler's insatiable lust. Moxted, a huge, important-looking man, who was head of a rice firm, spread himself over the table, slightly fuddled with drink, as he

stared with semi-intoxicated concentration at the candles, covered with dim glass globes ; and Bates, alert and keen, leaned back and watched the others, which included Lomax in a noisy mood, and Suffy Rutherford, who seemed very silent and depressed.

At the arrival of Quentin and Nesbit there was a touch of lifted interest. Things had been sagging a little and Dillon invariably brought with him a kind of added zest to matters. He played with the reckless disregard of a man who never counts the cost, and fortune favoured him. But he was not thinking of what he was doing, and, after a little, Nesbit made an excuse, saying that he was tired of play, and he left the table.

Dillon's eyes travelled the intent faces, and rested on that of Suffy Rutherford, who watched Nesbit swing out through the door. Suffy was anxious, and even his losses did not prevent still keener anxiety from driving them out of his mind. The game went on steadily, and the concentration in the atmosphere strengthened. How intense it was, Dillon thought, and how futile. If any of them had used the same effort to gain the intangible along other lines, they might even have saved their souls. He had committed himself irrevocably, and the thought of the grotesque and brutal creature with whom he had exchanged identities dismayed him for the first time.

Outside, the fire-flies spun the mazes of a fairy dance, and the garden was still in its

garment of scent and flower. The room became a drugged place, and the faces round the table showed like masks, with strained set eyes, and his thoughts followed Nesbit who had gone in search of Marion Keith.

" You're having the devil's own luck to-night, Dillon," Swimerton said suspiciously, as he looked up his cards, and then, before Quentin had time to answer, the sound of a stifled cry reached them, and he sprang to his feet, overturning his chair.

He had a vague idea that Radstock shouted at him angrily, but he did not wait to hear what he said. Marion had cried out, and was in need of him to help her, and dragging open the mosquito door between him and the veranda, he ran quickly into the garden.

SHE was standing by the edge of the pool, her light dress shimmering in the moonlight, and her face as pale as ivory, and at a little distance off, Nesbit stood with lowered head watching her. He was in a raging fury of half-inarticulate passion, and his anger showed in the heavy lines of his bent shoulders. There was the suggestion of a bull about to charge in his attitude. When he came close to her, Quentin could see that the lace of her dress had been torn, where she held it over her shoulder. Nesbit had forced her to defend herself, so much was quite evident.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a thick, furious voice. "Get out."

Marion turned to him and her voice shook a little. "Thank you for coming," she said slowly, and then she drooped her head as though her thoughts hurt her, and moved away to return to the house.

"I'll speak to you presently, Nesbit," Dillon said as she passed him, pausing for a second and touching his arm with her hand. It bridged the gulf between them, and even his anger towards Nesbit was a little thing compared to the joy of their renewed confidence.

"You want an explanation, do you?"

Nesbit asked roughly. "Very good. Stop and hear it," he turned to Marion. "It's your business as well as Dillon's."

"Miss Keith has no interest in anything we have to say to one another," Dillon said quickly. "Please go back to the house, leave this—leave Nesbit to me."

"If she has anything to say against me let her say it," Nesbit said, shrugging his shoulders. "She'll not get another chance in a hurry. I offered to marry her"; he was thunderstruck at the recollection of his own magnanimity. "By God, and she tried her airs and graces. And now," Marion was still standing at a little distance off, "a dirty swindler like you, Dillon, with a swindler's record, and a wife on the streets who kept you for two years, comes prancing in and asking me what I mean by it."

Dillon turned towards Marion again, "Please go into the house," he said, but he could not read her face as she went from him, and he wondered, rather helplessly, whether one was ever able to explain anything, or whether explanations are of the least real use. It was easier just then to let his anger dictate the most suitable line of conduct, and without waiting to consider he caught Nesbit by the shoulder and swung his fist clear and clean into his face.

"That's my answer," he said as Nesbit steadied himself for a rush and struck out, getting Quentin on the fore-arm as the men, who were aware now of some fierce struggle

taking place outside, came through the lighted doors and separated them.

Radstock, shaking and white with anger, stood gesticulating between the two men, and Swimerton, who had merely looked at the scene, turned away and walked rapidly down the path to the garden gate.

"What's it all about?" Moxton asked with a drunken titter, as he swayed on his feet, and Lomax held Quentin by the elbows, speaking as though he addressed a frightened horse. "Whoa, steady there, steady now," he said. "This won't do."

"What in hell are you fighting about?" Radstock said in a high, nervous voice. "Here, Nesbit, you explain."

"He accused me of swindling," Dillon said, drawing a quick, sharp breath. "I don't take that from any man."

Nesbit seemed to reflect over his words, and gave a snort of contempt. "I stick to it," he replied.

"Then stick away," Lomax suggested, "only, keep it to yourself. You two have got to make friends."

Rutherford was standing at a little distance from the group and had said nothing, but he spoke suddenly.

"I'm with you over this, Dillon," he remarked. "If anyone has to apologise it must be Nesbit."

"Apologise?" Nesbit's voice came with a roar, "Apologise?" and he added a string of

violent abuse. "It's time that Dillon cleared out of decent society."

Quentin was only attending with half his mind. There had been some real pleasure in getting his blow home on Nesbit, but Nesbit had done his dirty work well, and there was no recalling the spoken word. Perhaps it was the satisfaction he extracted from that very fact which made Nesbit swagger forward and say that both of them had been a bit hasty. He had one hand to his temple, and held out the other. "After all we're Englishmen," he said, "and can behave as such, I hope." His expectation that Dillon would live up to the standard was obviously rather doubtful, but Nesbit was behaving like a hero in a novel, and he rather enjoyed the part. He had gone pretty far, but that could be forgotten and, anyhow, he had said nothing but the truth. In his heart he promised himself to trample again, when the moment for trampling arrived, but in the existing conditions there must be a truce. Therefore he stepped forward to carry off the situation with his usual and nearly unconscious insincerity. The bruise on his forehead burnt like fire, and his outheld hand was cold and sticky, and Dillon did not take it.

"Come on, shake hands, shake hands," Moxton said. "It's a sporting offer, Nesbit. I like you for it."

He was growing sentimental, and spoke of "white men" and the public schools. With a

quick movement of disgust Quentin touched the proffered hand.

It certainly had complicated matters, and to return to the Palm Hotel and remain there, was out of the question, he thought, with a feeling of thankfulness. He could remove himself and live at the Mandalay, and the farce of being kept for nothing would end automatically. Furthermore, he would write Nesbit a cheque for his account against him. But this did not protect Marion Keith from the vulgar attack of a man who would, inevitably, persecute her. Quentin saw clearly that he was in no position to fall out with Radstock, who already was on the alert to seize a chance of getting him out of the way. The original plan had been to decoy cheap dupes to the gambling tables, and Quentin had brought men who were of a different stamp. "The club" had paid well, and there was nothing actually of the nature of a swindle in the management, but Nesbit and Radstock knew that if Dillon were exposed, the edifice would crash down with an unholly clatter and the dust its fall would raise must be of the kind that doesn't brush off. They would only try to get rid of him secretly, and he was determined to give them no such chance.

"I'm prepared to let the matter rest," he said. The group began to disperse, Nesbit following Radstock into the house, and leaving Suffy and Dillon the only two remaining guests.

"I don't care what you've done," Rutherford said, gripping Dillon's arm. "You've put your

mark on Nesbit. Talk of swine . . . I could tell you things about him if I cared to."

"I don't want to hear them," Dillon said shortly.

What was the use of talking to Suffy about anything? Suffy was one of those futile people whose opinions are an echo and who have no definite personality of their own. He left him without speaking again and walked away, his white figure appearing ghostly in the strips of moonlight which fell through the laced leaves of the rustling palms. Dillon would have given everything he possessed for ten minutes' talk with Marion Keith. He did not want to excuse himself to her, but he would have liked to explain so that she could understand. He wanted to assert his normal identity as it were, rather than evade the penalties of his own rash act. The insult thrown at him by Nesbit was personal in the last degree, and was evidently true of William Dillon. Marion had no reason to think it a lie, and yet—and yet there was such a thing as a woman's instinct that went deeper than external evidence. Could she give him the one chance this possibility might offer?

There would be a conference between Nesbit and Radstock, and whatever they mutually decided would be put up to Quentin by one or other the following day. He suspected that they would attempt to buy him out, since threats would not be of any use, as their own hands were tied. They might heap abuse on

him privately, or in confidence to each other, but Nesbit had held his tongue, even in his mad rage, when the other men joined them. Quentin's own position was a strong one, and it mattered nothing to him what they said, so long as he still kept the entrée at Rosemary Villa.

Before he went to bed he told his Goanese boy to pack his clothes, as he intended to move to the Mandalay Hotel the following morning. He awoke with a sense of relief, thinking that his irritating partnership with Nesbit was actually ended at last, and there was no sign of the proprietor of the Palm Hotel as he went to breakfast. It was Radstock who was to be ambassador, and who came up the steps as Dillon's luggage was piled on a *ticca gharry* and the Goanese boy collected his belongings in the hall.

"Hullo, hullo," Radstock said with a touch of compulsory zeal. "Not going away, Dillon?"

"Only to the Mandalay Hotel," Quentin said carelessly, and Radstock drew him into a quiet corner, his face puffy under the eyes and anxious in expression.

"But we can't run to that," he said, frowning. "It's out of the question. Nesbit is standing you your keep, and you aren't such a boob as to think that anyone at the Mandalay will pay for the pleasure of your society?"

"I've paid Nesbit for his hospitality," Dillon said with a smile. "You needn't worry, I prefer to choose where I stay for myself."

Radstock shrugged his shoulders. The problem was beyond him, and he evidently jumped to the conclusion that Dillon had blackmailed Amesbury and was consequently in funds. "If you can do it, well and good," he said grudgingly. "I came here to say that Nesbit won't cut up rough. He's prepared to overlook your conduct of last night. Damned decent of him."

"Damned decent," Quentin echoed.

"But all the same," Radstock blinked his red-rimmed eyelid, "you ran it too fine. He told me that you interfered between him and my niece. Now, I'm no Puritan, but I do draw the line at your cutting in where ladies are concerned. A man with your record, Dillon, hasn't any claim to butt in. Nesbit's a solid fellow, and he means well by Marion."

"I don't follow you," Quentin said with the same dangerous calm. "You can't trade women like goods, and no decent man gambles with women. Leaving my record out of the question for the moment, as I see it, you're backing up Nesbit because you can't help yourself, and it's a dirty trick."

Radstock muttered under his breath. "I didn't come to you for advice," he said rudely. "We've decided, Nesbit and I, to give you another chance. I mean, we won't chuck you over yet. If you behave yourself properly, things can go on, and we won't give you away."

Dillon's laugh rang out spontaneous and clear. "I'm tremendously obliged," he said,

and he got up. "There's nothing more to be said, except that if I find that Nesbit has been annoying Miss Keith any further I shall bash his face in."

Quentin did not wait to continue the argument, and walked down the steps of the Palm Hotel into the aching glare of the day outside. He felt uplifted and refreshed as the inspiration of battle stirred in his blood. With some human beings indignation acts like torment and eats their flesh and exhausts their spirits, but with others it has the quality of an elixir, and on its waves they rise to a kind of glory of attack. The grossness, stupidity and degradation of the two men who were his so-called partners disgusted him to the soul, and they were now his declared enemies, which is always a good thing to make sure of.

It was also comforting to be away from the Palm Hotel and the persistent advances of Mrs. Synd, who pursued Dillon when no one else offered, and had to be avoided; and to be back in more familiar surroundings. He intended to punt no more on behalf of Radstock and Nesbit, and it was as though he had severed a tie of the flesh which united him with swine and pariah dogs, just as he was spiritually united with the fresh eternal things that shone in the eyes of Marion Keith. The little people once again were banded against him, as Wade and the men who had combined with Wade had fought to get rid of him. He had chosen, in the latter case, to "depart out of

their coasts," but now he had something to fight for and his mind recaptured its serenity.

When he was installed in the Mandalay Hotel, and sat in a big airy room which looked out over the lakes, he lost himself for a little, dreaming, as men whose life is action sometimes dream, while the fine outlines of little gilded minarets against the sky caught the sunlight, like the outposts of a city of vision. A red rose bush outside his window sent up a deep fragrance of rich sweetness, and far away the chiming of a distant clock struck its music in the air. He could see the placid bosom of the lake stretched like a sheet of blue and silver in the distance below him, and the mystery of life swept over him. The drowsy day had passed its meridian and was turning towards afternoon, and Dillon did not stir, but sat with his feet up on a long chair, looking out through the open door that led into the veranda. He had no special power to grip motives or read hearts, but he wondered, as he sat there, what the next stage of the story would be. Could he go to Marion and tell her exactly how he stood, give her proof that he and William Dillon were two different men, and ask her if she would marry him? It was the direct way, and Quentin was a follower of direct action in all things.

He could foresee that Marion's life would be made unbearable for her, and that, whatever else came out of his fracas with Nesbit it would certainly not be any additional peace in her

lot. Nesbit had the tenacity of a bulldog. Behind him, Radstock and his wife would work to assist the proprietor of the Palm Hotel.

The day turned towards the deep, strong tones of afternoon, and from that to delicate mauve, and through magic changes into purple, and at last to blue, until all the world beyond his window melted into a vague impression of exquisitely soft shadows and faint, tender lines of feathery palms, fused into an intangible whole, and making place for the deep lapis blue of the night.

And it was only when his Goanese boy had reminded him twice that dinner was ready, that Dillon aroused himself from his thoughts and dressed as quickly as he could. He had made up his mind to go to Rosemary Villa as usual that night, and endeavour to see Marion, and take her, as the strong man takes the kingdom of heaven, by sheer force of his own restless personality.

MARION returned to the house, feeling as though a mine had exploded under her feet. She had suffered from the coarse love-making of Nesbit, whose feelings, once he understood that she was refusing his offer to marry her, had taken an ugly turn. He had not spared her, and he reviled Radstock and his wife, in his determination to humble her pride. Who was she, to set herself up on a pedestal and scorn the offer of a decent man? It was sheer lunacy on her part to lose her best chance.

She still suffered from the touch of his hands as he had grasped at her and tried to prevent her escape, and her cheeks grew hot at the memory. Dillon had come in response to her cry for help, and then, upon his coming, she had heard Nesbit's hoarse angry voice shout insults once again, but this time it had mattered more—far more.

She crouched on the floor by her bed, in the great sparsely-furnished room where she slept, a lighted wick floating in a saucer of oil throwing its meagre illumination to the ceiling. There had been something else as well as anger in Nesbit's voice; he spoke out of a firm belief in all he said, and his sincerity hit the quivering mark of her own heart. What he had said of

Dillon's record hurt her to recall. She shut her eyes tightly, as people do who are suffering from acute physical pain.

Every detail of the picture was impressed upon her memory, and she told herself that as long as she lived she would never forget the white moonlight in the garden, and the sparkling line of diamond light, where the rays pierced through the trees and fell upon the water of the pond below the stone steps. There was no luxury in her grief; it came upon her, hard and bitter as an iron yoke, and then she laughed because tears were of no avail. She was afame with indignation. Dillon had imposed his personality upon her and, like a fool, she had refused to admit the all too obvious facts connected with him.

He was linked in a dishonourable partnership with her uncle, living in Rangoon as a rich man so that he could collect his dupes the more easily, and every detail of his life was a lie. He had a man's way with his fists, and for that much, she thanked him; but it did not exonerate him. Some instinct of former tradition still remained underneath the rubbish and the lies, and could be evoked, but the balance was loaded up against him.

Marion got up from the floor and went to her dressing-table, and with hands which trembled in spite of herself, she repaired the tear at the shoulder of her dress. She had been blindfolded for long enough, and intended to have things out with her aunt; she and her uncle

had their own perpetual schemes, and the stifling sense of being fooled on every hand, worked in her mind. To-night, she told herself, she would end it all.

Making her way along the passage and down the staircase she peered over the balustrade and listened. The guests had all gone, and she trusted to find her uncle in his room at the end of the passage. Her heart was throbbing and her nerves tingled as she crossed the veranda and took her way cautiously towards the closed door at the end of the covered way; and standing outside for a moment, she heard her aunt's voice speaking from within. Mrs. Radstock was evidently replying to something her husband had said.

"I wish she could be got out of the way," the words came to Marion, "Nesbit will make trouble."

"There's that fool Rutherford . . ."

Marion pushed the door open and stood facing them.

"If you are disposing of me," she said tempestuously, "I prefer to have some say in it myself."

Radstock looked up and shrugged his shoulders carelessly. He was entirely indifferent to her, and her aunt, who was sitting with her large, strong hands clasped before her on the table, gave her a cold glance of contempt.

"You appear to have listened at the door," she said in chilling tones; "as you have done so, it simplifies matters. Your uncle and I as

we are your guardians while you remain here, are anxious to see you settled. In our judgment, it is best for you to marry Mr. Nesbit."

It seemed to Marion as though a cord had been tightened round her throat, and she was being strangled.

"*Best* for me?" she repeated. "After the insufferable way he has behaved to-night?"

"Come now, come now," Radstock interposed, "don't try that kind of talk here. You're penniless, and we can't help you for ever." He got up and stood with his hands in his pockets. "If you'd been a cheery, hearty, nice natured girl, and helped a bit, I'd not force the question; but, as it is, you're a kill-joy. That's what you are."

"You want me to go away?" she asked.

"I've shown you a great deal of patience," her aunt replied, "and your ridiculous infatuation for Dillon is only a girl's madness."

Marion threw out her hands desperately. "Mr. Dillon was kind to me on the voyage," she said, her voice trembling. She had denounced him to herself in her heart, but she could not speak against him in the presence of the two who watched her with such deeply malevolent eyes.

"Have the truth about him," her uncle said savagely. "He's been a convict, and is married or tied up to a broken-down concert singer. She broke herself keeping him decently clothed, if you want to know, and he's never done an

honest day's work in his life. He was sent to me with a dirty record."

"Then why . . . ?" she began.

"Because I wanted a fellow who wasn't squeamish. It's time you opened your eyes and looked about you." He grew more heated and angry. "I'm sick of the sight of you myself."

"Aunt Mildred!" Marion turned towards her imploringly. She always liked her aunt, and yet there was no pity in her eyes now and she did not move.

"What your uncle says is perfectly true," she said, her sombre look darker than usual. "It's been a failure, the whole arrangement."

"I could have got a dozen girls who would have jumped at your chance," Radstock said insolently, "jumped at it. Take what you're offered, and be thankful you have such a first-class opportunity," he laughed unpleasantly. "Nesbit's a fine man, any girl might be proud to marry him."

"But where shall I go?" she said desperately, speaking more to herself than to Radstock and his wife.

"Try your other chance," Radstock suggested. "A fool makes a good husband—you've got Rutherford to fall back upon."

Marion faltered for a moment. Was it any use speaking to them, or telling them of the scorn she felt? Any use to bare her heart to fresh wounds when she had already suffered so much in the course of a few hours. It was

rather the moment for her to get away from voices and faces, and think things out alone. She took one quick glance around her and, without a word, she closed the door and went back to her room.

When she had gone, Radstock sat down again and looked at his wife. He had used the whip, and felt a great satisfaction in the recollection. "We don't want her," he said. "That should shift her out."

"It won't make her marry Nesbit."

"I don't so much care." Radstock whistled gently to himself. "She's no use to us, Mildred, and though the club is paying and things look all right, you can't be sure of anything going on till kingdom come."

"I am not sure of it," she agreed gloomily.

"It wouldn't take much to kick over the cart," Radstock continued reflectively. "If it got known that Dillon is an impostor, or that Rutherford has lost so much as he has," he broke off and wiped his face with his handkerchief. "I'd like to strangle that girl. Why can't she help? If she had any spirit in her she'd play the game. Here we are in difficulties with Nesbit, and Rutherford is gambling like a madman because she gets on her high horse. She's been the damnedest mistake we ever made, and it's time she cleared."

"You can tell Rutherford to pull up," Mrs. Radstock suggested. "Warn him."

"I have," Radstock snapped irritably.

" Nesbit has, but he wants to get back on his losses."

Mrs. Radstock got up and spoke slowly : " I know Marion better than you do," she said. " The explanation in her case is, that she is in love with Dillon." She gave a cruel little laugh. " But that won't stand what she has heard to-night, I think." She stared before her with steady intentness. " To-morrow, when he comes, it might be as well to let her hear the facts again in his presence."

" And I am to be worried by all this footling nonsense," he retorted furiously. " Where's what we spent on her to make her look the part ? It might as well have been thrown into the river. I smoothed Nesbit down as well as I could, but she'll undo it all. The one thing you can count on her for is trouble."

He seemed to see his dreams vanishing out of reach, and, small and petty as he was, he nearly towered in his wrath.

" I know," Mrs. Radstock said, narrowing her eyes ; " but Dillon has been useful."

" I can run without him now," Radstock said, pouring himself out a stiff peg. " Why not let him have her ? Get them both cleared off. I believe that's a good idea, Mildred." He drank, and breathed hard.

" No," his wife replied with a sudden touch of feeling. " I don't care for Marion, but I won't do that or have any hand in it. I'll stand between her and ruin so long as I can ; and, in any case," she added, " I do

not think that Marion would take such a step."

Radstock did not speak again. He took out an account book from a drawer in his writing-table and sat down to study it closely, neither did he turn as Mrs. Radstock left the room.

It seemed to her that if she could urge or persuade Marion into an engagement with Rutherford, the situation might be saved. Even with his debts, he was something of a match for a girl placed in her equivocal situation, and she might count herself lucky. The Rutherfords held a good position in Burma, and were not likely to let their son go under because of his debts. On one score, her own conscience was quite clear. She had done what she could to prevent Dillon having any easy chance to get hold of her niece, and, hardened as she was, she regarded him with deep loathing and contempt. His evident admiration for the girl had been enough, and she saw him as a wholly unscrupulous and heartless vagabond, whose looks and manner made it easy for him to strew his way with conquest.

Nesbit would make his anger felt by both her and her husband—that was unavoidable ; but with Marion officially engaged to Rutherford, he could say and do very little. She thought the whole question over sitting in her bedroom, and the only detail missing from her plan was the acquiescence of her niece. Any softer feelings she had asserted themselves, and she grew less rigid than usual.

Some lost gleam of kindness or romance touched her for a moment. Suffy Rutherford had a way of making women sorry for him, and even the world-hardened heart of Mrs. Radstock melted a little as she thought of him. She would do what she could to further his plans, just as she had acted steadily against Dillon from the first.

As for Marion, there was very little sleep for her that night. She had to crush down a great tearing anguish in her heart. To lose what we love in life is far more bitter than to lose it through death. To see that the subject of all the impulse and longing in our heart is hopelessly and utterly unworthy, is a far more cruel experience than loneliness and despair. All the courage of her early upbringing could not protect her in the dark hour which had come upon her, and anything her aunt and uncle had added to it by their unkindness was as nothing in face of the facts themselves. Life looked so long and dreary, stretching out ahead of her through the years. Love would be around her, in the skies and flowers, in music and in every beautiful object upon which her eyes might dwell ; but personal love, with its warmth and glory, could never return to her any more.

She bent her head before the blow, and sat very quietly looking out of the window of her room. The agony of her pain did not lessen as she forced herself to face her trouble. Quentin was false to the core, and had hidden the

details of his shameful past history. There seemed to be two ways in which one could accept such a deep hurt. One was to care nothing, and grasp at the nearest reckless folly which offered, do anything, however mad and despicable, to escape ; the other, to rally the powers of the soul, and force oneself to see that life has to be lived sanely and decently, even if you are mocked by fate, or have lost sight of the stars. In those hours she developed unconsciously in the school of pain, realising that we all of us stand alone. She had suffered from a host of petty insults flung at her by people she hardly knew, since she had come to live with her uncle and aunt, and she was a dead weight upon their hands—a fact they no longer troubled to disguise.

Nothing could be more humiliating than her position as unwanted dependent in a house where, in any case, her life was utterly distasteful to her, and yet she could see no way out wherever she looked.

From clear grey the sky changed to faint orange, and then to vivid crimson, as the sunrise caught the waiting world into its glory of colour and light. Indistinct objects became clear, and the garden disclosed itself in fresh beauty. There was none of the tenderness of the West in the majestic splendour, and day sprang suddenly upon her as Marion watched with haggard, weary eyes. She had been trying to come to a conclusion, and when she dragged herself to her bed, she had made up her mind.

If Rutherford loved her, he might be content to accept the cold submission which was all she had to give him in return. It would be a way of escape, and in her ignorance of life Marion Keith tried to believe that by starting out upon a mad adventure one could leave the old things behind. She had not yet learnt that the shadows of memory are long ones, and that the one person from whom none of us can hope to escape is our own individual self. Circumstances could be changed, surroundings altered, but Marion Keith, according to the law which is immutable and steadfast, could never be other than Marion Keith. Yet she thought she had made a decision, and though it did not promise her a single flicker of either hope or joy, it was something to have arrived even at a lame conclusion. One day more she claimed for herself, and after that she would give Suffy Rutherford the opportunity he so anxiously sought.

Her eyes closed and she slept.

QUENTIN was waiting for his pony to be brought to the door of the Mandalay Hotel, and the current of people coming and going made an interesting picture for him. The hot, windless day was yet in the early hours, and a queer procession, gay and crudely coloured, which might have been a wedding but was in reality a Hindu funeral, went along the road, the noisy crowd following, while a tragic little band played in excruciating discord the air, "Oh! where and oh! where has my Hieland laddie gone?" The cheerful mourners swept out of sight, and a group of yellow-clad Hypongys sauntered after them, more or less interested in anything which happened in the streets, their priestly caste forming no obstacle to any amusement they might pick up incidentally in the romantic highways of the town. Dillon smiled as he saw them go. He liked the passionate colour of it all, and a little Burmese girl on her way to the temple offered him a flower which had been sprinkled with gold dust, with a smile, for which he paid her a rupee, and he put the flower in his coat.

A narrow street lay before the steps of the Mandalay Hotel, and the stream of life flowed on perpetually between the booths and beneath

overhanging balconies—a river of saffron and magenta, turquoise blue and vivid green, while a beggar, sitting close to the entrance of the hotel called with a piercing cry for alms.

It was through this wilderness of brilliant tints and dyes that Dillon suddenly recognised Swimerton driving towards him. He looked strained and worried, and he raised his hand to Quentin, indicating that he wanted to speak to him.

Dillon came down the steps slowly. He guessed that it was out of no special feeling of friendship towards him that Swimerton was there, and he realised that he must be on guard.

"I'd like a word or two with you, Dillon," Swimerton said, getting out of his small car; "where can we be alone?"

"There is my room," Quentin suggested, and he turned to his syce who had come up, leading his pony, and told him to wait in the shade of the hotel compound, Swimerton watching him closely all the time.

"I have come to you," he said, speaking to Dillon as they walked into the veranda outside Quentin's room and sat down in two long chairs, "though why I should have decided to speak to you I hardly know. You're up to the neck in this business, as much as Rutherford and Nesbit."

Dillon offered him a cigar and nodded silently. He could not very well repudiate his partners, and for the moment he judged it best to say nothing.

"I saw Rutherford's father this morning," Swimerton went on, frowning heavily and waving the cigar-case aside. "I do not intend to suggest to you that the interview was a pleasant one. Something had got to his ears, and—for reasons—he came direct to me."

Leaning back in his chair, the picture of indifferent ease, Dillon read between the lines of the statement. Rutherford's father had evidently got word of the fact that Swimerton was an habitué of Rosemary Villa. He must have threatened him with exposure. Having decided that it was thus the land lay, Quentin looked at Swimerton through half-closed eyes.

"As I said," Swimerton coughed harshly, "he saw fit to come to me, and the upshot of it all is that young Rutherford is to be stopped. He isn't to be allowed to gamble any more. D'you understand that?"

"And who is to stop him?"

Swimerton gave a groan of irritated exasperation. "I'm here to ask you to do something about it," he said. "I might have seen Radstock or Nesbit, but to be quite frank," he moved uneasily in his chair, "I simply couldn't bring myself to—Oh," he waved his hand, "whatever you really are, you give the impression of being a gentleman."

"Even so," Quentin looked at his guest again, "I am not responsible for what Rutherford chooses to do. I'll reason with him, if that is any use, but it does not lie with me to

chuck him out if he turns up and wants to play.”

Swimerton’s face was ghastly white, and he stared from under his lined forehead with wide-open, strained eyes. “I have given my word to Rutherford that his son shall not play again,” he said.

There was a moment’s complete silence between the two men, and then Dillon spoke. “Then, surely, it is for you to see that it is carried out.”

Swimerton leaned forward and struck the small table between them with his fist. “It’s a bigger matter than that,” he said angrily, “and if you force me to plain speech, you must have it. Radstock’s reputation stinks to the skies in Rangoon. There hasn’t been a shady deal pulled off in this place since he came here that he hasn’t had a hand in. Nesbit is only a little better, and as for you—I hear queer things said of you, Mr. Dillon.”

“Quite possibly,” Dillon agreed. His own temper, which was a cold one, was stirring, and he needed all his self-control. “It is just as well, incidentally, not to believe all you hear.”

“I do believe it. Otherwise why are you in with that lot?”

“For quite a number of reasons, one of them being, possibly, no better a one than your own. I like gambling.”

Swimerton drew a hard breath. “You do not understand the position,” he said, swallowing down his irritation. “I am not here to

exchange personal insults with you. I came on behalf of my old friend."

"And my reply is that I am sorry for Rutherford, who is a fool, and that if arguments are to be used, it is for you, and not me, to use them. I have no influence over him one way or other."

Swimerton brooded heavily for a time, sitting with his hands clasped between his knees. He seemed wretchedly uneasy and yet could not bring himself to ask a favour. In the end he spoke with a sudden rush of hostility. "There is another argument," he said, "though it is one I do not want to use. If it comes to the knowledge of Sir Walter Rutherford that nothing has been done, he will make it his business to lay the matter before His Excellency. Once it gets to that, you are only a fish on the bank, I take it, for the club will be closed, and your partnership smashed. How does that strike you as an alternative?" He watched the effect of his words. "From the point of view of self-interest it would be, I imagine, better for you three to decide upon refusing to permit Rutherford to play."

It all mattered very little to Quentin Dillon, and yet some obstinate streak in his nature hardened under threats, so he knocked the ash off his cigar and looked Swimerton in the eyes. "I agree with you that it is not a particularly amusing sight to watch a man ruin himself," he said slowly. "I should be glad, personally, to see Rutherford stand out. But, as you

know, the club is run on straight lines, and if he plays he takes his chance with the rest of us. What I do object to," he leaned forward a little, "is that you should require me to do your dirty work. You don't want it made public that you play, night after night, at Rosemary Villa so long as Rangoon is empty and you do not fear to be detected. Once your own skin is threatened you come here to me, and try to jockey me into carrying through what you are pledged to do yourself. You have made yourself personally insulting to me, a thing I permit from no man, and if you want a reply, mine is, flatly, this—take your wares to some other market. Go to Rutherford and speak to him, or try if you can induce Radstock to agree, or Nesbit. In any case, don't imagine you can gain your point by threats where I'm concerned."

Swimerton looked at him silently and rose to his feet. He seemed to have nothing left to say, but his anger showed itself in his eyes and the tight compression of his mouth. He was an important man in his profession, and though he had fallen through weakness into the habit of play, he regarded himself as powerful. Now a man whom he held in contempt as a well-dressed swindler, and who was far beneath him socially, had dared to speak to him as he had never been spoken to before. He could have used the cutting whip which lay on the table across Dillon's face, and his hands Itched to snatch it up, but once again something he could

not define in his adversary stopped him, and he faltered.

Dillon got up and stood leaning against one of the supports of the veranda. Having dealt with Swimerton as he felt he deserved to be dealt with, he was now in a mood to relent a little.

"I'll tell you what I will do," he said with his quick, boyish smile, which either aggravated or disarmed hostility. "On my own account, and leaving you out of the reckoning, Swimerton, I will give Radstock a hint to-night, and will see whether, between us, we can use persuasion. Only take it from me, that your threat has not influenced me one hair. Show up the club if you feel it will make you any happier, and get the Lieutenant-Governor to use his influence to close the place down. You'll be doing a good action if you do."

Swimerton rocked between two minds, and his rage cooled down suddenly. "I believe you're speaking the truth," he said in a voice of blank astonishment.

Quentin nodded. He had conquered, and though there was not very much pleasure for him in those days, he experienced a faint sense of satisfaction. After all, what right had he to complain? Swimerton spoke, not to him, but to the man whom he was supposed to be, and in spite of that the real Quentin Dillon had scored a victory.

"Do you really mean that you don't care if the club is closed?" Swimerton asked doubtfully.

"I don't care what is done about it," Dillon looked away over the city, lying below him.

"As you know, I had a row with Nesbit last night, and I have left the Palm Hotel."

"I know that, because I went there first to find you."

"It is quite likely," Quentin continued, "that I shall end my own connection with Radstock."

"I have regretted," Swimerton began, with a heavy flush, "that I ever went there." He stopped and looked down. It was strange to talk of his most intimate feelings to Dillon, and he had done so on a sudden impulse that surprised him.

"Then I'll do what I can," Quentin said, breaking up the slightly emotional sense of the silence. It made him feel awkward, and he had no desire to continue the conversation any longer.

"Very well," Swimerton agreed. "I am grateful to you, Dillon, and if I spoke rather hastily, I am prepared to withdraw what I said." He held out his hand, and they parted, Swimerton getting into his car in the compound below, and Dillon standing where he was, watching him with his dark, strong eyes. He did not think very long of Swimerton or their interview, for his mind went back to Marion Keith. What was she doing, and did she believe the charges which had been made against him? How was he to put his own house in order?

He paced the veranda with his hands deep in his pockets, thinking steadily.

After all, there was no reason why he should not tell her the truth, and no reason why she should not believe it when he did. She should know the whole facts of the case, and either exonerate him or, at least, bid him good-bye without being in doubt any more of what the truth really was. He could not be sure that she loved him, but the strongest desire in his heart was to stand cleared in her eyes. Once he had established himself as a decent member of society he would be able at last to breathe freely again.

He went down to the compound and got on to his pony, riding out into the strong, hard sunlight with a feeling of increasing happiness in his heart, every longing he had for her growing stronger. The image of her face was as clear in his eyes as though he actually saw her, and he greeted her in spirit. He intended to go to Rosemary Villa that evening, carrying out what he had promised in connection with Rutherford, and see Marion, placing his future in her hands.

From point to higher point his spirits rose upwards, and the sheer delight bore him company as he rode under the heavy shadows of the trees. William Dillon, with his ugly past, was only a bogey whom he intended to exorcise. Not a real person, with his unwashed hands and ill-shaven chin. He had acted as an agent of fate, and brought about Quentin's

further meeting with Marion Keith, so he still owed him much for that. As a pawn in the queer game of life he had done his work, and there must be an end of him and all his devious ways, once and for all.

Quentin thought of the evening which lay ahead of him, and his eyes softened. So far as he saw it, there was no insuperable difficulty ahead. But human eyes cannot see very far, and Dillon's were more than a little blinded by the dazzling glory of his love.

The last person he gave any special thought to was Rutherford. He fully intended to speak out to Suffy, telling him that he was every kind of fool. He despised the hand-to-mouth existence which was sufficient for Rutherford, and was far from understanding his weakness.

To be one of those people who never know either what they are doing or what they want to do, was utterly inexplicable to the mind of Quentin Dillon. While he was fully prepared to admit that he himself was capable of wild and inconsequent action, he had no use whatever for the type of man who can be blown hither and thither by every wind of chance, with loosely-flapping sails and idle helm. He was quite human enough to resent Suffy's sentimental adoration of Marion Keith, and though, compared with the brutal insolence of Nesbit, Suffy might be said to be *sans peur et sans reproche*, he had no rights, in the eyes of Quentin. He would have liked to have cleared him out of the way with a gesture of wide

indifference, and that was exactly what he intended to do. He forgot, or he did not realise, that fools have a way of causing endless difficulties, not only for themselves but for others, as they wander blindly along the path of life, interrupting the plans of the wise, and not infrequently reducing them to chaos.

THINGS in the abstract which seem possible, have an uncomfortable way of becoming grave and menacing as we draw nearer, because the gulf which separates thought from action is a much wider one than we imagine, until we attempt the crossing. For Marion Keith, it was easy enough to regard an engagement with Rutherford as being a possible way of escape, but in the morning when she reviewed the situation afresh she shrank back.

Terror of life has the stupefying effect of a drug, and her fear remained with her and shadowed her as she joined her aunt at breakfast.

Mrs. Radstock showed a kinder face again, but there was no forgetting the events of the previous night, and Marion's manner was constrained and self-conscious. They avoided any intimate talk, and Marion excused herself as soon as she could, and went out and wandered in the garden. She was still miserably undecided and could not tell what she would do, until at length she went through the gate and took her way into the city ; trying to comfort herself with the light and colour around her.

Her pride had suffered from what her uncle had said to her, and to break his bread was

bitterness. She told herself that she could not continue to be dependent upon him, and yet the alternative was abhorrent to her, and the idea of making herself over to Rutherford merely because she could see no other way of escape, seemed not only unbearable, but intrinsically mean.

Lost in her troubled thoughts, she went along a colonnade in the Chinese quarter where the shadows were dark, and it was very unlikely she would meet anyone she knew ; so that it came with a shock of surprise when she heard her own name spoken, and Mrs. Grant, the wife of the American Baptist missionary, greeted her with great enthusiasm.

Mrs. Grant was one of those people who are innocent of any hint of the artistic temperament, and are wonderfully consoling in times of stress. Her outlook on life was narrow, but clear, and she had no gifts of conversation, though she talked a great deal of little events, and had a happy laugh. She was stout and robust, and her voice had a high, cheery note. Tragedy had never touched her, and she suggested farmyards and hayfields, rather than courts or palaces. She brought you down to the commonplace with a run, and made it appear a good, unexacting level to dwell upon. Just then, her arrival was little short of an angelic visitation to the tired eyes of Marion Keith, and her kiss was in itself a benediction.

" You aren't looking too grand," she remarked as she took Marion's arm, looking up at

her, for she was short and square in build. "I believe you need a change."

"I'm sure I do," Marion smiled rather wistfully, "but I don't see how I shall arrive at it."

"Come to us," Mrs. Grant said with friendly hospitality. "Jeremy thought a lot of you, and said you had intelligence."

Marion shook her head. What was the use of suggesting to her uncle that she should go to these kind friends? Her uncle and aunt might agree, but it would only be running away from facts. The prospect, nevertheless, was alluring, and she thought of it with a desperate longing for peace.

Chattering as she went, Mrs. Grant pressed the point. There was fresh air to be had at Myittha which, as she had no words to express its glories, she described as a "very nice little place indeed." You got there by river boat, and it lay below the Katchin Mountains in the ruby mine district, and all along the hills there were ruins of pagodas, mysterious and ghostly, like the fragments of old dreams.

"Any time you feel like it, Marion dear, just come along," she said as they parted outside a huge shop which was a kind of general store. "You can count on a welcome, and I can tell you that I don't think Rangoon suits you in the least."

When Marion turned away, Mrs. Grant ran after her again and called to her. "I forgot to ask after Mr. Dillon. Do you ever see him?"

"Quite often," Marion said, her delicate colour flushing up suddenly. "He is in partnership with my uncle."

Mrs. Grant nodded and smiled and said no more; but when Marion had vanished into the crowd she pursed her lips and thought for a little before she plunged into the shop. The world, for her, was divided into people who were "nice," or those who were "not nice," and she knew only too well that Radstock belonged to the latter category. No one called him "nice," and she had been half inclined to think Dillon rather worldly, because his clothes fitted him so well, and he seemed to have such a number of expensive socks and handkerchiefs, but even so, she had scented romance and hoped that "something would come of it." If Dillon was hand in glove with Radstock she could only pray that nothing would come of it, even though she had a deep-rooted love of romance.

Marion Keith was, in her eyes, a lovely and distinguished-looking girl, and she longed to think of her as happy, but one shrewd look in her eyes had banished any illusions she could have had on that score. She decided to tell Jeremy about it and ask his advice, for she had an unshaken faith in his wisdom.

The chance meeting with Mrs. Grant had lifted a little of the depression which brooded over Marion Keith, and as she went back to Rosemary Villa, she felt the relief which it always brings, to know that some people are so

far blessed by fate that their lives are steadily normal. Mrs. Grant gave that assurance only to look at her. She recalled remembrances of the faithful days when her own life had been something firmly established, and she could tell what the weeks would bring.

Again and again the thought of going up the restful waterway of the Irrawaddy to Myittha, which was a "very nice little place indeed," and where the hills themselves repeated fairy-tales to the weary soul, and to creep into the quiet of a religiously-ordered life, where Jeremy read family prayers, and where such an existence as that in Rosemary Villa would be regarded as the wildest fiction. It would be like a return to childhood's days again, and Marion's heart ached sorely with the very thought of it.

Love was broken and cast aside, and illusion lay shattered at her feet, and now she was on her way to make the beginning of a huge pretence which might last a life-time. She looked around her desperately as she closed the gate of the garden and stood within.

Her aunt was standing in the veranda, smiling at her in a way which awoke fresh fears. Such a welcome only meant that she was to be forced to do something against which she was likely to revolt.

"Rutherford has been here." Mrs. Radstock said. "I think he wanted to see you, child; but he has gone."

Marion trembled suddenly. Her nerves were overstrained, and she lost courage for the

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moment—a critical situation for anyone ; the more so because panic frequently hides behind it.

" I shall see him some other time," she said evasively. " My head is aching, Aunt Mildred."

" Then go and lie down," her aunt suggested. " You look very white and tired. When you are my age, Marion, you won't trouble yourself so much about things."

Marion went to her room and closed the door. She moved about mechanically and collected some clothes which she wrapped up in a thick piece of brown paper, and counted over the money in her purse. Ten pounds was left to her, and she had still a hundred at the bank. If she went at once to her aunt and told her that she wished to go away to Mrs. Grant, she might obtain a grudging consent, but her own forces were down to zero, and she could not face the thought of a contest of words. She did not admit to herself that she intended to go away, but if she did go, it was open to Rutherford, or even Nesbit, to follow her, and, for the moment, she longed for complete peace. Mrs. Grant had told her how to get to Myittha ; she was catching one of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company's boats at midday, and according to the tides, the next would leave that night, and then there would not be another for several days.

Marion's mind dwelt on the thought longingly, and after a time she grew quieter. The position had so far improved that she was now able to

consider a possible alternative. The day passed wearily, and towards late afternoon Marion walked into the veranda. Rutherford was sitting at the further end, looking dully in front of him, but at the sound of her step he glanced up and smiled. He came towards her ; short, woebegone and pathetic, and putting his hand on his heart, he bowed with a pretence at lightness.

"So you have come at last," he said, arranging the cushions in a low chair. "Mrs. Radstock said that you would."

Marion looked at him sideways. Her aunt had said she would come, and what else had she said ? Marion begged the question, with a hopeless attempt to postpone the inevitable. She could see every line in his face, with the signature of early dissipation scored on it, and she shuddered slightly. Where was there any glory in love given too late, by a man who had slid too far down the easy way to the gutter ? No doubt he was done with the husks for ever now, but the past remained, and had marred him hopelessly.

He moved a little restlessly, and spoke. "I had a talk with Mrs. Rad," he said awkwardly, "and both she and your uncle are satisfied—I mean, I have their consent, Marion."

"Consent to what ?" she asked.

"Mrs. Rad told me," he went on quickly, "that you do care a little . . . and I love you so much that I am prepared to take you on any terms. At present, it's true, I am in some

difficulties, but I believe my luck is in at last." His temperamental optimism caught him and he spoke hopefully.

"So my Aunt Mildred gave you to understand that I cared for you?" Marion said quietly.

"Don't blame her for it." He leaned forward. "I shouldn't have ventured to speak otherwise. I can take you away from here, and Nesbit won't dare to trouble you again. Look at me, Marion, and tell me that you really do mean to be my wife."

She looked at him, recalling the hours of the previous night and wondering at her own acquiescence in any such plan. There he was; kind, certainly, and willing to be indulgent and generous, but as she felt his hands touch hers, she snatched them away. His thin hair and pale blue eyes, his fixed way of smiling and his noisy laugh jarred on her excruciatingly, though he was far from laughter at that moment, and very much closer to tears.

"Aunt Mildred spoke without any right whatever," she said, getting up with an angry gesture of refusal. "I care nothing at all for you. If you think that I should let Mr. Nesbit force me into an engagement with you, you are wrong. If I have any feeling for you at all, it is, or was, one of friendship, and now, you have deliberately spoiled that."

"Married to such as he!" she thought. "A man whom other men laughed at while they stood him drinks so that he would become 'funny,' a man who did not, in her eyes, possess

a single decent standard"; and then she thought of Dillon, and at the thought she covered her face with her hands and broke away from Rutherford with a stifled cry, so poignant and full of anguish that he stood back and watched her go without saying another word.

Yet she came down to dinner, paler than usual but quite calm and self-possessed, and when her aunt remarked that the vacant place had been laid for Rutherford, wondering why he had not come, Marion acted her part creditably.

"He is coming back later," she said. "He asked me to give him an answer to a question, and when he comes, it is ready for him."

"Good girl," Radstock said with a laugh. "Getting sense, eh? I'm glad to hear it."

"I think you are right," Mrs. Radstock said deliberately. "It is easy to guess what the question was."

Marion relapsed into silence. She sat looking at the worn tablecloth and the tarnished Burmese silver which stood on it; every detail was photographed on her memory. The servants came and went, fighting in an ill-conditioned way outside the room, and looking unkempt and wild as they carried in dishes and plates. When they dined alone, no attempt at display was ever made, and a few half-faded roses in a bowl formed the only effort at decoration. Candles with glass shades threw an insufficient light around, and Radstock and his wife sat there without speaking. There was something sinister and unearthly in the room,

and no one made any effort to dispel the increasing and ever-deepening silence.

It was the last night Marion Keith ever intended to sit there with her aunt and uncle or break their bread. Whatever came of it, she was going to catch the Flotilla boat and get up the river to Myittha, where no one could possibly follow her for at least a week.

During that time anything might have happened, and at least she would be clear of Rosemary Villa and all the horror she had suffered during the time she had been there.

When dessert was set out before them, Marion excused herself and left the room like a shadow.

"She intends to marry the fool," Radstock said, filling his glass with port from a decanter.

"It looks as though she has made up her mind," Mrs. Radstock agreed, and they were silent again.

After a time Radstock looked at the clock. "We open at ten," he said. "I expect one or two new fellows in to-night. Nesbit will be pretty sore."

"Don't go out." Mrs. Radstock awoke from her thoughts. "Marion and Rutherford are probably in the veranda, and I don't want them disturbed. If anything were to pull her up now, the whole thing might be off. Her heart is now in it."

"Her heart!" jeered Radstock. "What has that got to do with it? You heard her say herself that Rutherford was coming and she had her answer ready; that's straight talk,

isn't it? She's got an eye for getting on in life."

Mrs. Radstock did not reply, and once again the slow, heavy silence fell in the room, and the two looked before them, immersed in their own thoughts; and then, with violent suddenness, the silence was smashed like a pane of glass by the loud report of a shot fired close to the house. It rang through the room, and at its sound both Radstock and his wife sprang to their feet and stared at one another.

DILLON had finished dinner, and with his mind full of what he intended to say to Marion, took his way towards Rosemary Villa. It was to be the ending of the farce, not only for her but also for Radstock, and the truth must be told to all who were concerned. He would have to talk well, and talk for his life, to Marion Keith. Whether Radstock listened or believed mattered less than nothing, for it was always easily possible to prove his facts; only he wanted first to convince Marion without proof.

The night was full of whispering sounds, once he had left the town, and full of wonder to the soul of a lover, so that Dillon reached the gate into the garden of Rosemary Villa in a beatific frame of mind, increased by the golden light of a late-rising moon.

As he opened the gate he glanced upwards and breathed a deep breath of great contentment. It would be so good to be Quentin Dillon once more, and to have done with his namesake for ever; and just as he was thinking of how he should go straight up to the drawing-room where Marion Keith sat, avoiding the gambling-rooms until he went there to see Rutherford and carry out his promise to Swimerton, the revolver shot which had startled

Radstock and his wife rang out, and clamoured for its passing second in the ears of Quentin Dillon.

He did not stop to think or search for any explanation of the sound, but ran up the steep path in the direction of where the shot came from, and as he reached the crest of the sharp hill, the doors into the veranda were flung open and Radstock came out, followed by his wife.

"Who fired that shot?" Radstock asked wildly as Quentin joined them.

Dillon made no answer, but ran onwards to the edge of the pond, lying under dark, heavy shadow, and then both men halted involuntarily.

On the surface of the water something white showed in the dimness, and Quentin stripped off his coat and plunged in. He had no time to think or consider, or to answer that awful question which was sounding through every fibre of his soul. It was a moment for action and nothing else. Radstock stooped and picked up something from the ground which caught the light, and looked at it, as his wife joined him. It was a small nickel-plated revolver fully loaded, with one chamber empty, and he shuddered with sudden trembling when he turned to Mrs. Radstock, but neither of them spoke, and they strained forward watching Dillon, who pulled himself up from the edge of the pond, dragging a heavy, inert mass on his arm.

"Give me a hand here," he shouted, and Radstock obeyed silently, bending to lift the drenched mass to firm ground, and as they laid the body there and looked at the upturned face, the same ghastly silence held them all.

"This is the worst thing that could have happened," Radstock said, his eyes on the face of Rutherford, who lay indifferent to them all, with a scar marked on his forehead. "The very worst. My God! It's serious."

Quentin knelt beside Rutherford and felt his heart, but not even the faintest beating told that there was any life left in him, and he looked up again and nodded slightly. "He's dead," he said, rising from his knees. "It was suicide, I suppose."

Radstock handed him the revolver, and Dillon examined it. "It's the end of our club," he remarked. "I wish to God I'd stopped the fool from playing. There will be hell over this, Dillon."

"I had intended to speak to him to-night," Dillon said regretfully. "Swimerton told me that Sir Walter was anxious—but who could have expected this?"

"Why couldn't he have done it anywhere else?" Radstock said furiously. He had not the smallest shred of sympathy for the fate of Rutherford, and a madness of rage seized him to think of the consequences of an act which affected him so closely. "As it is, Rangoon will be too hot to hold us, and there will be

an almighty row"—his mind travelled onwards—"and then there's the girl."

"Marion was to have given him his answer to-night," Mrs. Radstock said, speaking for the first time. "She said at dinner that her answer was ready for him."

"Give me a hand," Dillon said abruptly, "we can't leave him here," and with an inarticulate sound of anger, Radstock bent down and they carried Rutherford into the house. They brought him through the open doors of the gambling-room and laid him on the central table, covering him from sight with a cloth. Suffy had finished things up, and so far as he himself was concerned, the play was played out for good and all. His spirit was far away, and, detached from it, his body was terribly pathetic, as it still held some of his old irresolution and weakness. They closed the door and went into Radstock's room at the further side of the passage.

"That girl said she was going to give him his answer," Radstock said, his nostrils dilated and his eyes straining frantically. "I don't understand it. Wait a bit, Dillon, we must stop any of the fellows coming here to-night." He ran to the door and shouted to the *durwan*, giving orders rapidly. "Nesbit may have some suggestions, and I suppose the damned thing has got to be known, but I don't see much use in staying on here."

"If you clear out, you may be suspected of

murder," Dillon said, as he closed the doors.
"I'd not do that if I were you."

"You know it wasn't," Mrs. Radstock said broodingly. "As you ran up the garden you saw us come from the house, after the shot was fired."

"Certainly I know it." Quentin looked round at them. "But you have both mentioned Miss Keith. I want you to understand that her name is not to be brought in, when questions are asked. Rutherford was in money difficulties. When his affairs are gone into that is sure to come out, and will be the explanation of his suicide."

Voices were heard outside the closed doors, and there seemed to be an altercation going on between several men and the *durwan*, and the watchers within became rigidly silent. It was as though some immediate menace threatened them, and then passed, as retreating footsteps echoed slowly and reluctantly away.

"I will make my statement," Radstock said, sitting down and propping his head on his hands; and he had evident difficulty in making any sound. Something fantastic had caught him into a snare, and dealt him destruction as completely as the bullet which had entered the brain of Suffy Rutherford, and he was like a man bound by fate.

Dillon's thoughts flew to Marion. She had expected to meet Rutherford and was, so he had gathered vaguely, on the eve of being forced into an engagement with him. That she cared

for him he did not for a moment believe, but, in any case, the tragedy must be broken to her gently.

Suffy's act of self-destruction appeared to contradict the theory that Marion had promised, or was about to promise, herself to him, and even though Quentin threw the dead man a passing tribute of pity, he regarded his conduct as that of utter selfishness, sublimated, perhaps, by some ideal which none of them understood, but none the less the act of a coward. Had he shot himself in his own room it would have been ghastly enough, but to come and deliberately take his life outside the very window of the woman he professed to love, had something cheap in it, in the eyes of Quentin Dillon. One last wild bid for pity, made at the expense of a girl's reputation, when already the small world who were aware of her, turned cold eyes in her direction. If Quentin knew anything of human nature, he knew that there would be numbers of men and women who would discount the story of Rutherford's debts, and prefer to think that there was more behind it, and that his ultimate desperation arose through events connected with Marion Keith. Try as he might to force Radstock and his wife to keep her name clear, it would still be dragged into the mud, and a wild notion of carrying her off himself, there and then, presented itself to him.

"I think Miss Keith should be told," he said quietly, for he had been listening, in fear of

hearing her step outside the room. The alarm had spread to the servants' quarters, and they were buzzing like a hive of agitated bees in the darkness outside. At any moment Marion might hear from the *ayah* that a terrible event had taken place in the garden, and he longed to spare her what he could of the first shock.

"You are right," Mrs. Radstock said, recalling herself from her thoughts, "I will go and tell her."

She left the room, and Quentin sat down opposite to Radstock. "The best thing to do is to telephone to Swimerton," he said; "he is sure to be back at his house by this. As he knows Rutherford's father, the news can be broken by him."

"Have you ever seen Rutherford's father?" Radstock asked, looking up. "No? Well, he's a Scotsman with the temper of a fiend, and he thinks no end of his family and his name. What do you suppose he'll have to say over this?"

"Anything he may have to say won't alter facts, unfortunately," Dillon replied. "I suppose he knew what sort of man his son was."

"If he did, he'd not admit it. He'd rather die than swallow his pride." Radstock lowered his voice to a whisper. "Nesbit had it that Rutherford had been up to something shady. Taken a bribe over the Hansara case. I didn't believe it, but Nesbit has his own way of getting to know things, and he *swears* to it. Now Rutherford has cleared out this way," he

glanced in the direction of the other room, "the whole thing may come out. Oh, my God," he covered his face again.

"Then you think this . . ." Dillon broke off. "You imagine that the man who bribed him may have threatened him with exposure?"

"I'm pretty sure of it. His father will have to know, unless the fool destroyed his papers."

Dillon sat very still. He recalled Suffy's white face and nervous manner for weeks past—the manner of a man over whose head there hangs a suspended menace. Poor devil, how he must have suffered, pursued by invisible foes and driven by some unseen taskmaster; coming there, night after night, in the hope of his luck favouring him sufficiently to make him clear, and dreaming madly of Marion Keith.

That night, things must have gone too far, but what the circumstance was which forced him over the precipice and into the abyss no one would ever know.

"Unless he has destroyed his papers, the bribery business will come out," Radstock said again, "and to cover that, Walter Rutherford will move heaven and hell. It means that he will break me, and Nesbit isn't going to get out either. As for you—you don't count," he glared at Dillon. "Rutherford gave a rocky judgment before he left Hansara, and it got talked of by the natives in the place. An appeal was filed last week and he was to be recalled to his district."

"And in the face of that you were prepared to try and force Miss Keith into a marriage with him? Knowing that he stood to be openly dishonoured?"

"I didn't *know* it," Radstock retorted. "I knew that Walter Rutherford would never let it come to that, and being a rich man, would pay his son's debts."

"Did Mrs. Radstock know?"

"I don't see why I should be cross-questioned," Radstock said with a fresh outburst of anger, "but as you ask, she did not know. It was between Nesbit and me, and he had his information from Harim Das, a Bunya in the native bazaar."

Dillon was just about to speak again when the door was opened and Mrs. Radstock stood looking at them, her face grey and colourless, as she drew deep panting breaths. "Marion is not there," she said. "I have searched the whole house and she has gone."

"Let her go," her husband replied sullenly, and Quentin sprang to his feet.

"Gone?" he said. "But where could she have gone to? At this hour, and with no friends in Rangoon?"

"I can't tell, I only know that she has gone," Mrs. Radstock said, speaking more quietly. "I looked in her room and found that she had taken some of her things with her, so she must have thought it out. The *ayah* knows nothing, and there is no word of anything anywhere." She looked at Dillon

with glazed, set eyes. "How do you explain it?"

His glance travelled from Radstock to his wife in utter mystification, and then Mrs. Radstock caught him by the arm. "Don't lie to me about this," she said imploringly. "You have induced her to go away to you; I feel that you have. If it had not been for what Rutherford has done it could not have been known of in time, but you can't pretend now. Give her back to me, for at least I could shelter her from a much worse thing than her marriage with that dead man could have been."

Dillon put his hands over hers. "On my honour, I know nothing," he said. "I swear it," and as he spoke she released him dumbly.

"Then what does it mean?" she asked in a voice which was hardly audible; and with her words a new horror seemed to creep into the room. "She was to have seen Rutherford to-night, and she told us that she had her answer ready."

Radstock got up and leaned over the table. "We must do something about this," he said, and then he sat down limply again.

"But what you suggest is beyond reason," Dillon said quickly. "The two things have nothing whatever to say to one another. It is frightfully urgent to find Miss Keith."

A knock echoed into the room and Dillon turned and stood by the outer door. "It's Nesbit," he said, speaking over his shoulder.

"Then let him in, man," Radstock said

roughly. "Let him in; what are you waiting for?"

Opening the door, Quentin admitted Nesbit, who pushed in, asking angrily what they were all doing, and what had happened. He stood there looking from one to the other of the tense, strained faces.

"Rutherford's shot himself in the garden. He's dead," Radstock said, looking furtively at his colleague to see the result of his announcement. "He fired on the edge of the pond and fell in. Dillon got him out stone dead."

Nesbit pulled himself up and whistled. Nobody stirred and the silence was immense and awful.

"That's dished us," he remarked, helpless for the moment; "dished us."

Dillon walked to the door. "I shall go and see Swimerton," he said; "and there is the question of Miss Keith; she must be found to-night."

"Miss Keith?" Nesbit asked roughly. "What's she got to do with it?"

"Nothing; but she has left the house."

Nesbit's eyes lighted unpleasantly. "Looks rather peculiar," he said. "I suppose you are *sure* that Rutherford shot himself?"

It would have been far easier to stay and catch Nesbit by the throat and punish him for the suggestion in his words, but Quentin had other thoughts which conquered his rage. Marion was out in the darkness alone, and had been driven there by some cruel provocation of

circumstances. She might even have gone to seek his help in her despair, turning to him at the last. If he were to wait and give Nesbit the answer he had asked for it would only serve to pile up the increasing intricacy of the whole desperate situation, and without any reply he went out of the room, closing the door behind him. He was drenched to the skin, and still in his shirt sleeves, but appearances hardly mattered in such a moment. Before anything else, he must get back to the hotel to find whether Marion had come there to ask his help, and failing that—failing that, where was he to begin in his search for her?

He could not apply to Hall, the head of the police, without telling him that Marion Keith had disappeared at the very time when Rutherford fired the fatal shot, and to combine the two events must inevitably link her name with the tragedy. He ran down the road, bare headed, and caring nothing what anyone thought should they see him, and his appearance in the hall where a number of people were sitting, drinking coffee and enjoying the cooler hours of the night, was startling enough to excite no little comment. But there had been no inquiry for him, and no one had asked for him during his absence.

With a heart as heavy as lead, Quentin went to the telephone and rang up Swimerton. He hung up the receiver and sat down to wait for Swimerton's arrival at the hotel, and as he thought again of the events of the evening, he

decided that nothing whatever must be said of the disappearance of Marion Keith. He would find her, he swore it faithfully to himself, and the voice of mad slander must be stifled. Radstock had nothing to gain by speaking ; Mrs. Radstock would protect her niece, and Nesbit—if it got to Dillon's ears that Nesbit had talked, he had better look out for himself.

THE news of Rutherford's suicide ran like fire through stubble, and everywhere people discussed it. He had been so well known and universally popular, and Rangoon talked of nothing else. Down in the native quarter it was spoken of, and strangers in the city, who had never seen Suffy in the flesh, were wildly interested in the tragedy of his final quitting of the world. In the offices and the bars the circumstances were discussed freely, and the Rutherfords were for the first time in their history regarded with universal sympathy.

Everyone knew it was suicide, but for family reasons the verdict was brought in that Rutherford had injured himself with a revolver he carried, and had been drowned accidentally. His funeral was a huge function, attended by His Excellency, and everyone mourned him, forgetting his futile sins and remembering only his cheery good fellowship.

That was the surface of the situation. The various hidden issues went far deeper, though not known to the whole world of wagging tongues. People had heard of Rosemary Villa, and that Rutherford's "accident" had happened in the garden there was not a point to be overlooked. Radstock had an evil reputation;

no one knew his wife, except such as Mrs. Synd, who now repudiated her old friendship volubly at the races and in the Gymkhana Club ; and there was a niece, who had also been seen and commented upon, but who had not been heard of since. That was the first stage of the affair.

Later, it became known that Rosemary Villa was "to let." Boards with a notice to that effect stood at the entrance gate, and whispers grew louder, saying that Radstock had been, justly, given a hint to leave Rangoon.

Nesbit, who had been a rather popular figure in his official capacity, was regarded as a sportsman in a vague, indefinite way. He had been often at the so-called club and had gambled there, but nothing more came to light so far as he was concerned ; and Dillon, who remained on at the Mandalay Hotel, was said to have lost considerably through playing at Rosemary Villa.

Of the Hansara case nothing whatever was said, and it was some weeks after the funeral of Rutherford that another story became talked of in lowered voices. Where it began, or who started it, was not apparent, but it had all the makings of a scandal, which gathered momentum as it went from mouth to mouth.

Miss Keith, the niece, was, after all, in the picture. It became rumoured that her disappearance had coincided with Rutherford's death, and the more hardy of the talkers hinted quite openly that, rather than accident, the

tragedy had possibly been murder. Mrs. Radstock's *ayah* had gone into service with Mrs. Augustine, the wife of a rich Eurasian, who talked to her as a friend, and thereby discovered that Marion had fled from Rosemary Villa the night of Rutherford's death. The Miss Sahib had been the object of Rutherford's attentions, and was in the habit of sitting in her room and crying, and it was common talk in the servant's quarters that they were to be married. The *ayah* had seen Marion go very quietly out of the house a few minutes before the shot had been fired. This was the basis of the story. The *ayah* was prepared to say that the Miss Sahib did not love Rutherford Sahib, and since the hour when she left the house she had disappeared completely.

At this fresh fuel the flames leaped again, and once more the subject was discussed with added adornments.

No official search had ever been made for the girl, and the Radstocks had vanished also. The house on the ridge was empty, and people went there to look at it, filled with curiosity to see what sort of place it really was. It was felt that Marion had joined her relations, and should be traced and handed over to the law, but, beyond plastering her name with mud, there was no one who had sufficient evidence against her to prove anything.

The case against her hardened and became an accepted theory. If she were innocent, why had she hidden herself away? Someone had

said that her aunt and uncle disclaimed all knowledge of her, saying that she had gone to friends, and when one or two men asked Nesbit if he could add anything to the subject, he said he preferred to keep a shut mouth.

His manner of keeping his mouth shut was quite sufficiently damning to increase the feeling abroad against Marion, and the proprietor of the Palm Hotel was bitter of tongue when he mentioned Rosemary Villa, and even more so when he spoke of Quentin Dillon.

So far as Dillon was concerned, it did not trouble him to find that he was cold-shouldered, and that men who had been friendly veered away from his neighbourhood when they met. He knew what was being said, and wore himself out in angry denials of the atrocious story spread about a girl who was not there to defend herself, and who had no one to defend her. He would have left Rangoon and shaken its red dust off his feet for ever, had it not been that one thing alone held him there.

He could not believe that Marion had left Burma. None of the passages taken in the shipping books were in her name, and in any case he believed her to be without money to get a passage home.

To raise a hue-and-cry would only be to increase the scandal which was talked incessantly, and the sense of failure lay heavy on his soul. There was no comfort anywhere, and his fears for Marion arose in him like an armed band as he waited through the days

and weeks. He grew to loathe Rangoon and hate the gaudy show of the streets, and the isolation which surrounded him since he had become in some mysterious way suspect, affected him far more than he would have admitted. Swimerton alone remained his friend, and it was to Swimerton that he first told the whole story.

"A practical joke that turned out anything but funny," Dillon said, as he sat in Swimerton's garden, a host of brown-winged moths flying in the brief green dusk. "God, if I'd only known in time!"

"We've most of us said that," Swimerton commented, "but, with this talk going on, you simply can't raise any question with the police. Lady Rutherford is like a savage tigress, and Walter feels that his son was duped, and that quite possibly Miss Keith had a hand in it. Lady Rutherford knows nothing of the Hansara case, or the ugly charges which would certainly have been made if Suffy had lived, and her nerves are raw."

"Have you heard anything of Radstock and his wife?" Dillon asked disconsolately. "I have wondered sometimes if Miss Keith ever left Rangoon. She might have gone back to Rosemary Villa to look for them there, and found it empty."

"I heard that they had gone to Calcutta," Swimerton said, clasping his hands behind his head. "She was fearfully broken; they can't show their faces here again."

Quentin folded his arms and sighed. He had lost a great deal of his energy, and the never-ceasing trouble of his mind had told upon him.

"God knows what Marion Keith is doing," he said. "God knows where she is. I can't forget that they drove her out."

"Go back to England," Swimerton said, looking at his guest. "All this is doing you no good."

Dillon got up and began to pace the garden path, his friend joining him. "It's nearly two months since it all happened," he said restlessly, "but how can I leave? She was so utterly friendless. There isn't a living soul in the place she could have gone to then, and now, if she were to come back, how do you think they would all treat her?"

"Badly, I'm afraid," Swimerton replied; "there's not much mercy about these times; we seem to have a queer way of bludgeoning women, without waiting to hear if there is any other side of the story."

"Then it comes to this, that if she ever does return—if she is still alive, I am the only one left." He turned impetuously. "I walk up to that cursed house night after night, just in the hope that I may find her. I've bribed the *durwan* to keep her there if she comes, and let me know, but she never does come. I've searched every by-street in this vile city, looking for her, and never found a single trace of her, and every day I begin with some faint hope and end utterly hopeless."

"I don't know what to say to help you."

Dillon pulled himself together and laughed. "I'm bad company to-night," he said apologetically, "but it's something to unburden one's mind. I'm grateful."

They parted at the gate, and Dillon took his way up the familiar road and into the garden of Rosemary Villa, and as he went he saw a face which was dimly familiar to him. It was the face of a gaunt, ascetic-looking clergyman, who gave him a square and uncompromising stare of dislike.

As Quentin went onwards he recalled the name of the man. It was the American Baptist missionary who had travelled out with them on the *Thebau's Queen*, and he turned irresolutely, thinking that he might speak to him of Marion Keith. But the feeling passed, and he went onwards. Mr. Grant had never been particularly friendly, and his look had given Dillon to understand that any revival of their acquaintance would not be acceptable. No doubt he had heard the common talk as he might easily have done anywhere in Rangoon, and in any case it hardly mattered.

Grant had known and liked Marion, and for that reason it would have been a small blessing to have exchanged a few words.

He walked into the garden and stood by the dark, ill-fated pond, where weeds and flowers covered the water like a garment, and the evening breeze rippled the stagnant surface. Many people would not come there at all now,

as the place had a bad name and was said to be haunted. Haunted for Quentin Dillon it certainly was, and his memories rushed upon him with the cruel force of a time which has gone by and may never return any more.

The house stood gaunt and vacant, with closed doors and windows thick in dust. The owner would find it difficult to let the place, and its former ramshackle appearance had intensified, making it a kind of outcast among the sparse company of dwellings along the rise. Melancholy and full of windy desolation, it watched the garden, all its human use reft away from it, and left to stand there soulless and deserted.

In the dark of the early night Quentin stood outside, and the sorrow of the derelict house was in accord with the sorrow of his own heart. There was a unity between them and the poor place which caught at his own sympathy. Out of his personal experience he too had learnt that the malignancy of the forces banded against him were doubled by uncertainty and the confusion which resulted in his own mind. He was like a man who is blindfolded, just at the moment when he most urgently needs his sight.

The "accident" had happened, and Suffy Rutherford broke up everything, leaving darkness behind him which remained impenetrable. It was still unknown what had really happened, and it would remain unknown. Two irrefutable facts only stood out distinct. One, that Suffy

was a dead man, and the other that Marion Keith was nowhere to be found.

The *durwan* was playing on a wistful little flute to keep evil spirits at bay, for he was in a constant state of fear, and the notes tripped out in melancholy cadence with no semblance of a tune, repeating and reiterating the sound in the lonely garden, and at Dillon's approach he shuffled along the veranda, greeting him with a low salaam and saying in a dejected voice the words he always used, "Another night by Allah's will."

"Has anyone been here?" Quentin asked sharply.

"A padré sahib, Huzoor, but he say nothing. He only look about and go away again."

So Grant had been sufficiently interested to come and look at the house. Dillon shrugged his shoulders. Even a spiritually-minded man, it appeared, was capable of feeling the vulgar curiosity of the crowd, and coming to see the place where a fellow-creature had killed himself.

There was nothing more to say, and Dillon went away again, eating his meal in the solitude of his sitting-room, which he now preferred to the large dining-room of the Mandalay Hotel.

Another night had to be got through, and he slept badly, awakening soon after dawn, and looking out with tired eyes at the light which was strengthening in the east; and as he looked he repeated the *durwan's* words hopelessly—"Another day, by Allah's will."

WHEN Marion Keith's nerves got away with her, she did not stop to think. Had she done so she would have written a letter telling her aunt that she was going to friends ; but, in the overstrung state to which she had come, she feared to take the smallest risk of detection, promising herself that she would write and reassure Mrs. Radstock directly she arrived at Myittha.

When she left the dining-room she went to her own room and put on her hat, tying it with a thick motor veil, and carrying the necessaries she required in a small parcel. This done, she opened her door softly and peered out. Everything was intensely still, and the low moonlight just caught the upper branches of the trees, and painted long shadows down the flagged veranda. Slipping through the door, she ran by a straggling path which was hidden by a dense azalea hedge, and came to the gate unobserved ; and just as she reached it Dillon came up the road, and she drew back into the shelter of the trees.

All her love for him swept upwards in her heart, and she clung to a tree for support, watching him between the leaves as he stood for a moment looking at the sky overhead. Of

all men on earth he was the one whom she must learn to forget, and yet at that moment she hesitated and a wild longing to call him tore her heart with fearful anguish. He meant everything to her, and more than anything else it was he who was responsible for her flight. She pressed her hands over her mouth and stifled back her cry. Not in this way had the women of her household fought their battles, and once again she told herself that he was dishonourable and false. Beside him, Rutherford was clean and upright, and at whatever cost she swore to drive Quentin out of his place in her heart. Marion had a fundamental belief in the principle of cutting off the right hand should it offend her, and her courage returned. Dillon had a wife already, a poor creature whom he had cast aside, and faithfulness was unknown to him. It was hard to believe, but things which are hard to believe are sometimes true. She told herself this as she bit into her own soft flesh to ease the mental torture by some purely physical pain, and then the sound of a shot rang out with its startling message into the night.

She saw Dillon run forward, and came from behind the shelter where she stood to watch him go. Who could have fired the shot she could not think, but her purpose did not waver. She had been too close to capitulation even as she watched him to risk ever seeing him again, and her mind was made up. The only thing for it was flight, and the weakness of her own

heart warned her that she might betray herself. Voices were calling in the garden, and lights appeared from the servants' quarter as though some one was running, carrying a hurricane lamp, and, with a sudden return of fear, Marion went through the gate and sped down the road.

She knew where the office of the Flotilla Company was situated in Wharf Street, and hailing a third-class *ticca gharry* she drove to the place and took her passage from a young Eurasian clerk, giving her name as Miss Grant. It was all quite easily done, and no one took any special notice of her as she went on board, just before the *Maymyo* got up sufficient steam to depart along the wonderful waterway leading into the mysterious land ahead of her.

The *Maymyo* was a very small and old-fashioned river-boat, incapable of speed, and the captain informed her that it would be some days before they arrived at Myittha. He was a taciturn young man who regarded her with very little interest, and there were no other passengers on board except a commercial traveller with a cockney accent, and a young subaltern, who had brought a gramophone with him with which he beguiled the time.

Her cabin was small and desperately hot, and even when the *Maymyo* moved off the mosquitoes hummed furiously and drove her out on to the deck. There were cockroaches huge in size in the cabin, and Marion summoned up sufficient courage to ask the captain if she might sleep on deck.

"So that you clear out by six, I have no objection," he said, looking up from his writing-table which stood in the space in the centre of the deck; and on a large card set at his elbow, Marion read the words, "Don't worry the Boss."

All night she lay in the comparative coolness, her mind active and wakeful. She went back to the garden at Rosemary Villa and watched Dillon once more, with the same rage of loss and sorrow. It would take time to think of him without pain, and her heart ached desperately. To distract her thoughts from him, she tried to guess what the shot fired in the darkness might possibly mean, and, try as she would, she could find no reasonable answer. Yet it haunted her, with its persistent echo, and grew in menace as she thought of it, echoing back to her with the mysterious relentlessness of remembered sound.

It was comforting to know that she was now completely cut off from everything, and that the *Maymyo* was slowly dividing her from all which belonged to the life of yesterday, and already Rangoon lay out of sight behind them, lost in the river fog and blotted out in the darkness of the night. Her aunt and uncle had only desired to rid themselves of her and to force her into any marriage, however much she hated the idea, and she had taken the law into her own hands, and left them free of further obligation.

By daybreak they were well up the first

miles of the Irrawaddy, and Marion looked out at the jungle which crowded close to the brown water's edge. Far away the Shan hills gleamed in rainbow colours, and she watched the slow pictures pass as she lay in a deck-chair under the awning, young Mr. Jesson making music for her with his gramophone. It was a queer, dream-like experience, lived between the whisper of the forest and the whisper of flowing water, the banks inhabited only by strange-looking creatures who came to look at them as they plodded along, crowding down from their forlorn, nest-like houses which afford only the barest shelter, and peering wild-eyed at the passing Flotilla boat.

"Queer people. Hardly human," the captain remarked.

It was a relief to be away from Rangoon. Marion had not guessed how much the strain had told upon her until she left it behind and had time to rest her soul in quiet. Her gala life, with so little real amusement or happiness in it; the constant sensation of being spied upon, and the dread of Nesbit, were all lifted for the moment, and she could breathe again. Rutherford, with his persistence and his determination to use all the influence he could to prevail over her, was safely out of her path, and she need not fear to meet him at every turn. And last of all, the man she loved and must renounce was no longer there, pleading his unspoken cause. It was restful, and rest was what she most needed.

The river had its hours of splendid majesty, and was in full flood, so that sometimes it lay around them like a vast lake, and the blue hills changed their colour and made a great wall between her and the fever of what had been.

At the end of the dream she awoke and found that they had arrived at Myittha, where she was to leave the *Maymyo* and begin the process of explanation, which is one of the hardest parts of friendship, again. She would have to tell Mrs. Grant something, or hurt her kindly heart, and with a fresh sense of weariness she looked at the *Maymyo* as once more it plodded onwards, leaving her standing on the small wharf which jutted out under a group of palm trees, close to a white plaster shrine.

She had arrived, and she was not expected. Certainly explanations would be necessary.

* * * *

The padre's bungalow stood on a high point which commanded a view of the river and the low circle of mountains beyond. It was kept in fairly good order, but for the most part Myittha was a place which was dying slowly. Once it had been an outpost of great strategical importance, and forgotten wars had left their mark. Roofless bungalows of yellow plaster, stained with long scrawls of green, fell into the last stages of decay, deserted monuments of vanished life. Marion came to know the feeling of the place well, though at first the details escaped her. The rails were down on

the grass-grown racecourse ; the station club smelt of mortality with its empty ball-room ; the alien race who had claimed the place had departed, leaving only shadows behind them.

Her first impression was one of wonder at the park-like beauty of the billowy green rise and fall of the landscape, and the tender colour which floated over the hills and trees, and then she turned her mind to the more urgent question of finding her way to the Grants' house. A clerk, who seemed half asleep, roused himself and gave her directions and, taking her way under the dense shadow of towering trees, she passed the huge station church, wondering at its size, and followed the road which was bordered in high waving grass, round a series of curves, until she paused outside a neatly-painted gate. A little tin-roofed building stood near the bungalow, and was the church of the American Baptist Mission. Mrs. Grant had been able to conquer the ghosts of Myittha ; that was the first thought which came to Marion's mind.

Chicken, different in feather and contour from the scraggy *moorghis* she had seen everywhere else, strutted well fed and aristocratic behind high wires, and the garden was laid out in a conventional design, clipped and trim. A swing hung from one of the trees, and a perambulator with a white awning stood in the veranda, and in the beautiful, awful wilderness undulating away for hundreds of miles on either side, the wife of the American Baptist

missionary had introduced a steady suggestion of home and peace.

Marion opened the gate and went in, and a moment later Mrs. Grant was greeting her with a flow of cheerful welcome. She was too pleased to see her guest to be curious as to the reason why she had come, and led her into a small room gay with bright chintz, talking incessantly and telling her facts connected with the chicken and the children, who both played a large part in her life.

"Jeremy will be delighted to see you," she said, kissing Marion again. "It's such an adventure to have some one to stay. Myittha is a nice little place, but very lonely. There is no one here except the commissioner and his wife. She is stuck-up, and we don't get on any too well, and he, poor man, drinks. That's why he's here. The Church of England padre isn't our sort, and the doctor's wife is very fast. There's Mr. Franks, of the Bombay Burma, who comes now and then, and there are the military, only Jeremy doesn't much like military men." She was making up Marion's bed as she talked. "I hope you'll not find it very quiet after Rangoon, Marion, as I suppose you were very gay down there. I only got back two days ago. Caught the *Pegu*, one of the new boats which does the trip in half the time. You made up your mind in a hurry, at the last minute, I suppose?"

Marion sat down on her bed and took Mrs. Grant's hands in hers. She was very tired,

and as she raised her beautiful eyes to her friend's face, Mrs. Grant looked slightly distressed.

"Not anything wrong, I hope?" she asked, and appeared to be about to say something further, but stopped herself short. Jeremy was in the habit of impressing upon her constantly that the tongue is a fire. Being a kindly gossip, she had heard a great deal about the Radstocks from time to time, and was much interested in all news of her neighbours.

"I have left my uncle and aunt," Marion said, speaking with an effort. "It was impossible for me to stay there any longer, Esmé. I can hardly tell you it all just now, but they do not know where I am."

Mrs. Grant squared her broad shoulders. She liked the idea of sheltering a fugitive, and promised herself that the Radstocks might search Myittha in vain for their niece. "You are safe here," she replied. "Jeremy thinks very badly of your uncle—I may as well say so much to you. He has said more than once that he wished you were anywhere else. Not at all the right place for a young girl. I heard that they played cards for money."

"I am afraid that they did," Marion agreed, "but it wasn't that." She looked up again, her eyes full of tears. "I must not blame them; it was for another reason that I came away."

"There, there; don't speak of it if it upsets you," Mrs. Grant said kindly. "I'll tell the

bhisti to get your bath." She looked at the small parcel which held all Marion's possessions, "and if you want anything I'll lend it to you. Not that my clothes will fit—I'll tell you what we'll do. We can buy some material in the bazaar and I'll run you up something with my machine in a few hours."

She bustled off, full of hospitable intention, and Marion took off her hat and laid it on the bed. What a different world Esmé Grant had constructed around her! A world where the handle of a sewing machine made busy, whirring sounds, and where children were taught to behave themselves admirably, and chickens laid English eggs. She seemed to have specialised in economy and comfort, and to her the voice of Jeremy Grant was nearly as omnipotent as the voice of God. It all contrasted fiercely with the atmosphere of Rosemary Villa, and to Marion it offered the gift of calm.

She felt less tired when she had washed and dressed and came into the living-room, where Mr. Grant welcomed her gravely, and she sat quietly in a corner while he read prayers.

The American Baptist missionary was a man who knew no doubt or compromise. Right was right and wrong was wrong in his eyes, and he regarded Rangoon as a kind of Babylon of the East. Marion had come to them from an accursed city, and he was prepared to protect her and give her shelter, as though she had fled from the plague. He was implacably

earnest and entirely sincere, and mystical half-lights were not known to him.

A little later in the day he found an opportunity to speak to Marion Keith, and he told her that his wife had hinted at some trouble behind her sudden arrival in their house.

"I am glad to have you here," he said kindly. "Your uncle's house was not a suitable place for you, and you must make your home with us, without thinking of return."

She thanked him, her eyes on the neat garden lying beyond the open veranda, and her heart smote her. How could she live their life and think their thoughts, when all her soul cried out for a man whom Jeremy Grant would regard as a tool of Satan?

"If I may stay here for a little," she said slowly, "it will be a great help to me, but I want to go back to England."

"Stay here as long as you are willing to do so," he said in his formal way. "It is a great pleasure to us both to have you. If you wish your visit kept secret I will assist you, or if you would like me to write to your relatives, I will inform them of your arrival with friends."

"Please do nothing, just yet," she said with a sudden rush of emotion. Overloaded as she was, Marion could not face the idea of fresh conflict.

"As you wish," he replied, leaving her to walk into the sunlight towards the mission school.

NEWS travels very slowly to outposts up the Irrawaddy, and it was ten days after Marion's arrival that the paper informed Mr. Grant of Rutherford's suicide in the garden of Rosemary Villa.

Usually he did not confer with his wife, as he made up his own mind on all subjects, but on this occasion he sought her with a troubled face, carrying the paper in his hand.

"I think," he said, "this tragedy explains the reason why Miss Keith left so suddenly to come to us."

Mrs. Grant read the announcement with wide, startled eyes. "She would have told me, Jeremy," she said. "I am sure of that. I don't believe she had any idea. Of course she's not one to talk, but now and then she has spoken of Mr. Rutherford, and I am certain she does not know that he . . ." She waved her hands, unable to speak the words.

"I did not blame her for her silence," Jeremy said reprovingly. "It is a dreadful subject to speak of. If you believe that she does not know, she should be told, and you had better tell her." He paced the room, his hands locked behind his lean back.

Mrs. Grant wiped her eyes furtively. "Oh,

dear me," she said sorrowfully, " who would have thought it ? "

With the insight of a born sentimentalist, Esmé Grant had discerned that Marion's unhappiness had deep roots, and concluded that it arose from some reason other than trouble with her aunt and uncle. The girl had done her best to fit in with their quiet life, and had tried to take an interest in the interests of their days, but Mrs. Grant was not deceived. The question of letting Mrs. Radstock know where she was had been allowed to lapse before her evident fear of being traced and taken away again, and something deeper than a mere family falling-out lay behind her silence. Out of genial consideration for her guest, Mrs. Grant had never pressed the question, and as she went in search of Marion, she felt her heart beat with unusual rapidity. The secret, whatever it was, must be disclosed at last, in face of the fact that Marion had left Rosemary Villa the night of Rutherford's death.

Marion was sitting in the shade of a great teak tree, looking listlessly out towards the hills, where the lace-like spires of numbers of pagodas reflected back the sunlight. Myittha, lying in the faint purple of descending evening, looked like the land of Beulah, and over her head the crows cawed their harsh philosophy, telling her, or so it seemed, that the wise man numbered his days and applied his mind to such sensible arithmetic, and that life is a graveyard of buried hopes and dead ideals. The

mournfulness of the place oppressed her, and the brisk cheerfulness of Mrs. Grant was an eternal reproach to her own enduring sadness. But then, Mrs. Grant had everything she wanted, her wants being small, and Marion was desolate. She looked up as her friend came towards her, and read disaster in her eyes.

What had taken place, she wondered? Had her aunt discovered where she was and come to find her? A few hours ago she had heard the hoot of an arriving river steamer, and it was quite possible that anything might have happened. Holding herself very still, she waited until Esmé Grant joined her.

"My dear," she said, sitting down beside her, "can you bear some terrible news?"

"I can bear anything, if you will tell me," Marion said, taking a deep breath. "Please go on."

"Young Rutherford is dead." Mrs. Grant plunged into her story, not without a thrill of enjoyment, for she seldom had a chance of being so completely in the centre of a situation. "The very night you left—it must have been, for the details coincide exactly—he committed suicide in the garden at Rosemary Villa."

Marion turned a white face to her. "Then that was the shot I heard," she said, "and Quentin Dillon must have found him." She bent forward and shaded her eyes with her hands. "Poor Suffy—oh, poor Suffy."

"It was a dreadfully wicked thing to do,"

Mrs. Grant said, shaking her head. "Certainly I'm sorry for him, but to do such a thing!"

For a second Marion's thoughts carried her no further than the shock of the information, and then her mind became active again. If Suffy had shot himself there would be an inquiry, and things go badly with Radstock and his wife, and possibly even worse with Dillon. His record, and the fact that he had been convicted and done his sentence in England, would have to come out. In her ignorance of facts she felt some of this, and she grasped Mrs. Grant's arm tightly. "Esmé, I am terrified," she said quickly. "I have never told you, because it wasn't easy to speak of it, but I cared a great deal—do still care—for Quentin Dillon."

"But what has that got to do with it?" Mrs. Grant asked in amazement. "I'm afraid that he isn't a very nice man, Marion dearest. Jeremy didn't approve of him on the voyage, I know, and we saw then that he intended to make you remarkable."

"I must speak of him," Marion said frantically. "Oh, I know he isn't straight, but you see, as Suffy shot himself in this way, it will drag my uncle and aunt into question. The club where men gambled will be shut down, and Quentin was a kind of partner. Will the authorities *have* to know all about him?"

"You had better ask Jeremy," Mrs. Grant said reflectively. She was wondering at Marion's evident indifference to the fate of Rutherford.

The girl hardly gave him a thought, and all her mind was feverishly full of Dillon and no one else. This did indeed explain matters, but the explanation was in no wise a satisfactory one to hear.

Marion got up. "Where is Mr. Grant?" she asked. "I must see him at once."

"He is in the house. But Marion—Marion." Mrs. Grant called in vain as her guest ran up the hill, paying no heed to her, and she was obliged to follow more slowly, feeling that things were very wrong with Marion Keith.

It was not very easy to state the case to Mr. Grant. He asked a number of questions, and when he became aware of Dillon's record he grew exceedingly grim and hard. Rosemary Villa had sheltered a nest of evil doers, and though he remained kind in speech to Marion, he did not hesitate to tell her that any action on her part must be forbidden while she remained with them as a guest. There was nothing for her to do, but her distress was so evident that at length he reluctantly suggested that he would go to Rangoon himself and make full inquiries.

"She must leave Burma," he told his wife, "and go back to England as she originally suggested. At all costs, she must be set out of reach of that blackguard, and we must do what we can to help her."

Mrs. Grant agreed, adding to herself that Dillon was an attractive man, and sighing,

because attraction so unfrequently combines itself with the higher virtues.

At the end of another week the *Pegu* was on its way back to Rangoon, and Mr. Grant with it.

Mr. Grant arrived in Rangoon subject, like the rest of us, to certain prejudices. He had promised Marion Keith to see her aunt and uncle, and bring her word of them, but of Dillon he refused to speak. He was deeply shocked to think that she could take any interest in a man whom she admitted to be thoroughly depraved, and his former feeling of liking for her changed and became cold. She was infected with "the modern spirit," and he could not be at all sure that she had not encouraged the attentions of Rutherford. Her life at Rosemary Villa had evidently exercised a bad influence upon her, and though it saddened him to think so, he was less friendly to her than he was prepared to admit. Fundamental differences of ideas are destructive to friendship, and he saw her with more critical eyes as he weighed the question.

Upon his arrival at Rangoon he took up his quarters with his old friend Philip Macarthur, who was, in company with the rest of Rangoon, full of the story of Rutherford's suicide and the sudden disappearance of Marion Keith. The Rev. Philip Macarthur regarded Marion as morally responsible for the tragic death of the young man, and spoke with vehemence to Mr. Grant, who held his peace but grew excessively uncomfortable in mind. The Radstocks had kept a polite gambling hell, even worse things

were hinted of them, and Rutherford had been their dupe. To get him there into their power Marion had drawn the luckless man on, to the point of despair, and, in the eyes of Mr. Macarthur, she stood responsible.

"In these days," he said, looking at Jeremy Grant through his spectacles, "it becomes our duty to take a firm line. What has happened to the young woman we none of us know, but she has made herself an outcast."

"I am sorry to hear all this," Mr. Grant said uncomfortably. "Very sorry. We were fellow travellers on the voyage out, and I thought her a modest, well brought up young lady."

"Appearances are very deceitful," Mr. Macarthur remarked firmly.

"And this fellow, Dillon. What of him?"

"He is still in Rangoon, I am told. Very little is known about him, but I hear that his position is a most invidious one. You come here to find the place all alright with the whole deplorable story. My converts—what am I to say to my converts, when, among Christians, such things are done?" Mr. Macarthur grew angry and paced the floor, taking down the books from the shelves, opening them and closing them with a bang, and then replacing them again, for he was much distressed in spirit.

Mr. Grant held his peace. He was thankful that the Radstocks had left the place, as Marion's visit to Myittha could now be kept secret, and in the late evening he walked up to

Rosemary Villa and looked at the deserted house and garden. On his return he passed Dillon on the road, and all his former doubt and dislike of him returned fourfold.

So long as Dillon hung about Rangoon it was not safe for Marion Keith to appear even in Myittha under her own name, and the subterfuge irritated Mr. Grant. He saw, quite clearly, that she must be got away secretly, and that she should lose no time in doing so. Macarthur had impressed him with the fact of Marion's moral responsibility in the matter, and his heart contracted quickly and shut her out. She must bear the penance of her own light-mindedness, and though he was prepared to help her to get work, he was not prepared to encourage her to remain his guest.

All that he heard during his week's stay in Rangoon only intensified his secret anger towards Marion Keith. She had, in a sense, fallen among thieves, but that did not exonerate her. To Mr. Grant's mind, a woman who was personally attractive to men, was a snare in the path. He heard rumours of Nesbit's attentions, and his belief in her innocence fell away. She had run off to Myittha so suddenly and he wondered whether she had been entirely truthful when she said that she had not known what took place in the garden, that night. If Marion had been a plain, hard-featured woman, or a soft, domestic wifely person, like Esmé, he would have suspended his judgments, but as it was, her charm destroyed his faith. In some

vague way, he was aware of it, and had submitted to its spell, and for that very reason he was all the more resentful.

As no one suspected that he knew anything at all, he was forced to sit in great discomfort while Mrs. Macarthur expressed her views. She was a law-giver, and there was no appeal from her judgments.

The week dragged interminably, and at length Mr. Grant stood on the deck of the *Maymyo*, and looked up the wide reaches of the river, chewing the end of his bitter memories. That he should be the accomplice of a girl who, at best, was a heartless flirt was bad enough, but to be forced to keep her under his roof any longer had now become intolerable to him. He reckoned out the days of the journey which the *Maymyo* would take, steaming to Mogaung, and returning after three days. If the passage known as the Third Defile was passable for navigation now that the floods were subsiding, Marion must catch the steamer on its return journey and go back to Rangoon. He had booked a provisional passage for "Miss Grant," much against his conscience, and that would secure her an immediate transport to England.

As he was not really unkindly, he had decided to give her a letter to his friend, Dr. Arnold, who had written saying that he was in dismay at the prospect of losing his secretary who was going to be married, and the date would coincide with Marion's return. The place might be

filled when she got back, but even if it were, he intended to ask Dr. Arnold to do what he could for the girl. She must plead for herself, in any case, and the time had come when she could not remain under his roof. Each day on the river hardened his resolution, and he mounted the rise of his own house with determination in his heart.

Marion met him at the gate, with Esmé, and her eyes sought his, full of question. Something in his manner informed her at once that he was no longer her friend, and she prepared herself for what she was to hear. She had become accustomed to disaster, and met it quietly. In any case she realised that it would be impossible to stay on at Myittha and that, wherever she went, she could not continue to receive the hospitality of Mr. Grant.

She listened to what he told her, and sat submissively while he pointed out to her that the way of transgressors is hard. It was no use saying anything in her own defence, for he would not understand, and her distress with regard to Dillon was lessened. Nothing had happened to him, and she had worked herself up for no reason. Somehow or other, he had escaped his reckoning with fate.

"I saw Mr. Dillon," Mr. Grant said harshly, "but I could not speak to him. He is a man to whom no decent man will offer any appearance of friendship. Let me warn you afresh, Miss Keith, against your unfortunate habit of easy friendship."

In the end it was decided, under a decent cloak of affection on the part of Esmé Grant, and a dignified tolerance from her husband, that Marion should go. Esmé was loyal, but Jeremy's opinions were always her own, and she suffered, drawn between two forces. Marion and she had receded from one another, and were like two people waving their hands in greeting over a wide, dividing river, which grew vaster with every hour which passed.

OUT of necessity rather than choice, Marion Keith accepted Mr. Grant's letter of introduction to his friend Professor Arnold. It added to her sense of obligation, which is nothing when the giver is generous, but which can be ashes and dust if the facts are otherwise.

Dr. Arnold was an elderly professor engaged in the by-ways of scientific research, who lived in a small Devonshire village called Exwater. Years ago Mr. Grant had been a pupil of his, and Dr. Arnold had an affectionate memory for his young men, following their careers with unflagging devotion. He had found something to interest him in Jeremy Grant, and with his queer tenacity, kept him in mind and wrote letters to him at regular intervals. If Professor Arnold was already provided with a secretary, Marion had no alternative, and the money for her passage swallowed up the greater part of her resources.

It was not that which made her seek her cabin and cry her heart out, as she left Rangoon in the *Worcestershire*, and indeed she never gave it a thought. So long as she and Quentin were in the same land, the overpowering sense of loss had been easier to bear

Now, a door was shut definitely between them, and never in this world could she hope or expect to see him again. She crept up on deck and watched the distant line of the port as it died away from her sight, and remind herself as she might, that Dillon was worthless, and that she had no right to give him a thought, her anguish did not lessen in the least.

The day died, and night came with its darkness, and the sound of the ship ploughing through hissing seas seemed the saddest she had ever heard. The voyage was interminably long, dragging its slow days through, and she joined in none of the entertainments provided for the second-class passengers, so that they concluded that she was putting on airs and thought herself too good for her company, and her isolation became complete.

She recalled the journey out, and Dillon's care of her ; the transformation he had worked by his thoughtfulness, her gratitude to him for his kindness, and then, the sudden dawn of her own love for him. Her sorrow grew tearless, and she was able to govern, if not to conquer, the passion of her distress. Her pride and her love burned like vital fires within, the two flames for ever hostile, and she knew that she could never forget, never henceforth be the same in heart or action, and that the long battle would continue until her youth wore itself out into age.

Yet she used the simple weapon of self-respect against the might of the temptation

to write him a short line, saying where she was, and so she conquered. It was a little thing, perhaps, and yet it made up the sum of those things which are intrinsically great because of pity and grief, and love and sadness. The last memory she had of him was that of his gay, uplifted face, and then the tearing sound of a shot, and she could still hear his footsteps running up the path and dying slowly away, as of one who goes and can never return.

It was better when she reached England and took up her life once more, finding herself rooms in quiet lodgings in Chelsea. She wrote to Dr. Arnold sending him Mr. Grant's letter, and at the same time making a clear confession of her own ignorance with regard to the post. It would be an insupportable burden on her conscience to hide anything, and she hardly expected a reply.

But the reply came with surprising rapidity, as Dr. Arnold telegraphed, asking her to come at once on a month's trial. A letter followed in which he told her that he did not require a typist or a secretary with any knowledge of shorthand.

"I have moved slowly all my life," he wrote in a pointed old-fashioned hand, "and I like leisure."

Marion looked out through the dusty window at the street below and smiled to herself. Once, the idea of such employment would have depressed her horribly, but now, all she asked was seclusion and peace. Dillon had told her

laughingly of the Santamingo, a bird which was supposed by sailors to live in a place called the "Evening Island," and if you could catch it you got rest of heart.

"You and I will never catch a Santamingo, Marion," he said, "and I don't think we shall find the Evening Island either."

It was a far cry from the blue Eastern seas to Exwater, and not to be supposed that the Santamingo rested in the trees of Devon, but Marion made up her mind to try her best to please the professor, who liked leisure. If she failed to do so she would be out in the storm again, but what was the use of looking ahead?

She packed up her few belongings and left the crush and noise of London the following day, watching the changing country through the windows of the railway carriage. She had to catch a connection at a branch line at Exeter, and as she crossed the platform she saw a tall, aggressive-looking woman who got into a first-class carriage on the same line. Something in the way the woman walked was familiar, though Marion was certain she had never seen her before. Still, the annoyingly evasive memory troubled her. Not only the woman's personality was disagreeable, but the connection in her mind, which evaded her, was also unpleasant.

The train travelled slowly, stopping at every station and bringing her at last to Exwater. She had enjoyed the first clear sweetness of the keen sea air, and as she got out, her colour had

returned to her with the excitement of the new experience. There were very few people on the platform, and again Marion noticed the heavy-eyed, insolent-looking woman who, with the air of a second-rate queen, made her way through the gates, got into a carriage and drove off. As she watched her, touched by the queer uncertainty of her own feeling, an elderly man walked towards her and raised his soft, grey felt hat.

"Have I the pleasure of welcoming Miss Keith?" he asked. "I am Professor Arnold."

He was a man of middle size, carelessly dressed, but with a very impressive air of vigour and determination.

"I see," he went on, "that you are admiring our local empress, Mrs. Hume Nesbit. A lady of character. Character is my hobby, as you will discover presently."

"Mrs. Nesbit?" Marion said, and the colour forsook her face. "Is that who she is?"

She fancied that he looked at her a little oddly as he gave the porter orders to have her luggage sent to the house.

"I have neither a car nor a bicycle," he remarked, "and I called my house the Green Gate, because it has a green gate, and I could think of no other name for it. A confession of lack of imagination, you may think."

Marion hardly heard what he said. Old troubles, like old sins, have long shadows, and it alarmed her to find that having taken, as it were, the wings of the morning and hidden

herself in a remote village in South Devon she should come face to face with Nesbit's mother. How was it she had not immediately recognised her? The troubling sensation was explained, for mother and son were cut in the self-same pattern. She consoled herself quickly, and walked beside Professor Arnold down the steep village street.

"Exwater is full of eyes at this hour," he said in his pleasant voice. "Outwardly you see a simple village, the picture of repose and quiet, and presently you will hear the carillon. We have a carillon to remind us that time is passing," he looked at her with the same closely interested glance, "and yet I can assure you that we have our faults and our failings, and are not quite as good as we look—which," he added, "makes us all the more interesting."

They had come to the green gate as he spoke, and he opened it. A wall ran along one side of the road, and on the other a row of small houses of attractive and old-fashioned exterior made a kind of residential quarter. Above them the tower of the church stood square, with gilded weathercocks at each corner, and, as Professor Arnold opened the gate, the chimes rang out, possessing the air with their slow, deep cadence.

A curtain of crimson roses in flower, flowing over the grey stone wall, had prepared Marion Keith for a garden, but when she walked in through the gate she stood still in surprise at the beauty of the scene before her. High yew

hedges stood around the green turf, which was old and beautifully kept, and under an arch, cut in the close dark green, she could see the sweep of the river, and hear its murmur as it passed on to the sea. Walking onwards, with her hands clasped, she stood on a stone terrace, which ran from the back of the house to a flight of dark wood stairs, which went straight down to the river ; great masses of valerian in pink flower grew in the low wall, and delicate rock plants coloured the grey of the flags. A rose-garden lay beyond, and she turned away, as the too intense sweetness of a syringa brought back memories upon her, for she had promised herself that she would forget.

"The house has the advantage of being unique," Professor Arnold said, pleased with her pleasure in his garden, and she turned and looked at the low stone building with its heavy mullioned windows. "It was once a shed, and used in old days when Exwater was a great shipbuilding centre. Those days are done, Miss Keith, and there, at the end of the balcony, you will see the survivor of a vanished tradition."

Marion's eyes followed his glance. At the end of a balcony, and looking eternally out to the blue horizon of the sea, a huge ship's figure-head had been placed, of a centurion in armour.

"He and I are equally out of place in the modern world," the professor went on, "but we have both done our duty in our time, and here we both are. What he is watching for I do not know, and what I am watching for"—

he broke off and laughed—"why, I could not tell you that either. He wears better than I do in spite of his past history, but you must be tired. Like all silent men, when once I begin to talk I never know when to leave off."

Inside, the house was long and divided into two stories, two staircases leading upwards from the lower parts of the building, lighted by windows coloured with exquisite, faintly-tinged stained glass, which had been brought there from Italy. There was not the smallest touch of artificial culture anywhere, and the heavy carving over the mantelpiece in Professor Arnold's working room and through the house was singularly beautiful. There was something so spacious and at the same time irregular and unexpected in the house, that each new room revealed fresh treasures to the delighted eyes of Marion. The rough stone walls on the outer side of her own room had been distempered in soft primrose, and were otherwise still exactly as they had been when the Green Gate was part of the shipbuilding works, and it seemed to her that the contrast lent an added touch of dignity. The old association of the place still existed, combined with the delicate, fantastic additions brought to it by Professor Arnold. There was something of the cloister in the atmosphere, and the long music-room at the further end of the house held an organ, towering up with gilded pipes to the uncovered rafters of the roof. Old memories lived silently in the rooms, touched half solemnly with a consciousness of

many things—the significant events of life, contacts and partings belonging to far-off times. The dusky, jewelled effect of the stained-glass windows, and the open freedom of the wide balcony from where the centurion looked out to sea, gave harmony to the heart, and below the river stretched widely, the country beyond it lying like a many-coloured carpet, spreading away to the distant line of Dartmoor, dark against the gentle sky.

Marion felt that the modern world was at last very distant from her, and she could shelter safely behind the comforting grey stone walls. The roses of life would blossom and fall quietly, just as they did in the garden outside, with nothing but the changing season to scatter the drift of velvety, scented leaves ; and she sat in her room listening to the sound of murmuring water and offered up a prayer of thankfulness ; for just then she sincerely believed that all she needed was peace.

The professor was, she discovered, a psychologist, and as she sat at the heavy oak table he told her that he was working on his last book.
“ My swan song,” he called it.

“ I am growing old, and the time gets short,” he said, standing in front of the fire-place as he filled his pipe with tobacco from an old Dutch jar. “ Life seems very long at your age, Miss Keith, but when you are forty it will suddenly contract and you will think of all the things you might have done. When you are my age you will wonder whether it has all been worth

the trouble, and conclude, as I have, that work for its own sake is what the gods have given us."

Marion raised her eyes and met his look.
"But you must have done so much," she said.
"It must be something to realise that."

He smiled at her. "Yet the secret is that no one really does anything. This is the planet of good intentions and failure to achieve. We see the necessity for reforms, and yet they are not made, though numbers of worthy and well-meaning people spend their lives in the effort . . . ah, well"—he broke off. "What is the use of preaching? Of all the virtues the one I most favour is Faith. Keep faith with yourself, and you can win most battles."

"But faith in others?" she lowered her eyes,
"when they have deceived one; that is far harder."

Professor Arnold walked to the window and looked out at the distant ridge of the moor. "Nothing is easy," he said at last. "Never try to persuade yourself that it is. At your age, love, I imagine, is what presents itself as the great ideal. Even that passes away."

The evening sunlight was falling redly on the water and the low green hills, and it touched the helmeted head of the centurion with its lingering fire, while the carillon told the hour in music to the land. Turning away from the room, Professor Arnold spoke again, as much to himself as to Marion.

"I do not know if you are a student of Nietzsche," he said, "but late one evening in

Genoa, he was standing in the twilight, and heard the long chiming of bells which sounded to him 'as if insatiable' above the noise of the street. It was to him so thrilling and, at the same time, so childish that the words of Plato came back to his mind : ' Human matters one and all, are not worthy of great seriousness—nevertheless . . . ' " He leaned on the wooden balcony, his eyes towards the sunset. " We take ourselves too seriously," he said slowly, " we humans ; but one is forced back to the word ' nevertheless.' . . . "

She turned to her work again, and Professor Arnold went down the steps into the garden, and a little later she saw him pacing slowly up and down the stone terrace between the wind-blown clusters of pink valerian.

AFTER a time Marion grew accustomed to the life at Exwater. Professor Arnold ignored his neighbours, and saw nothing of them, because he said that he had a wise man's disinclination for admitting mosquitoes into his house, and he and his new secretary worked steadily at his book.

Once or twice Marion saw Mrs. Nesbit drive along the road beyond the Green Gate, and, whenever she saw her, the past laid cold fingers on her heart, but as the weeks went on and autumn came, she felt more securely established, and when the heavy south-westerly gales blew hard and sang around the grey walls, she sat at table near the hearth fire and drove away her memories.

This man of books for whom she worked had a curiously vivid hold upon people and things, and had a genial humour of his own; and the days slid by graciously enough, and when the night wind clamoured at her window and the voice of the Exe grew hoarse and loud, as she lay in bed at night, she could often hear him playing the organ, the great river of spacious sound flowing out to meet the tempest of waters, passing onwards in the dark. Marion moved through the weeks, held in the magic

of the quiet dream. She knew that she would awake from it, but what would awaken her she could not guess.

It was one stormy November evening, and the streets of Exwater were rain-washed and grey, when the blow fell. Marion had gone out for a walk, and had taken her way along a narrow path by the river, as she came back through the village. It was dusk, but not yet dark, and as she passed by the lighted window of a shop, a man came out, and without looking in her direction, walked on in front of her. With a pang of fear she recognised Nesbit. He looked prosperous, and walked with his careless swagger, staring at the girls whom he passed, and as she saw him her heart turned to water.

Taking her way quickly down a side street she avoided any meeting with him, and ran to the Green Gate, closing the door behind her and finding her way blindly to her room. If Nesbit were to discover that she lived in Exwater, her life would become unbearable, and it seemed like a piece of ferocious cruelty on the part of fate, that he should have appeared in the village.

Nesbit was the type of man who pervades a place. She had learnt that at Rosemary Villa, and in the tiny village it would be infinitely worse.

The house in which Mrs. Nesbit lived was one of the largest, at the end of the residential quarter, just opposite the Green Gate, and some of the windows overlooked the garden.

As it was winter, there was not the same fear of being seen, but she told herself that she would have to be a prisoner within doors, until he went away again. Comfort lay in the thought that Nesbit would not remain long in such a place as Exwater, and that he would go to London, but even so, her privacy was assailed, and he had opened the door which she had closed so firmly. Through that door, not Nesbit, but Dillon walked with his deep laughing eyes and sensitive mouth. In fancy, Marion looked full at him again; and then she thought of the miserable arrival of Nesbit. He would cast out the peace of the green low hills and the gently winding valleys, take the glory from the clear, quick flowing water in the woodland. The unexpected incident had shaken her nerves.

She joined Professor Arnold at dinner. A silver candelabra stood lighted on the table, which was drawn near the fire, and the Professor, who was in a silent mood, only nodded to her and said nothing, as she took her place opposite to him.

After a time he spoke to Marion. "Your hand is shaking," he remarked.

Marion started slightly and laid down her spoon. She was wondering whether or not she should tell him the story of her meeting with Nesbit; but even though she had a real affection for the Professor she hesitated. He had a way of putting one under a microscope which she did not altogether like, and also she

dreaded to increase her own fear if she spoke of it.

"Is it?" she laughed; "I have been carrying a load of books in from the library."

Professor Arnold nodded and made no reply. He was subject to spells of silence which lasted for days, and Marion realised that at such times he did not wish her to speak. At the end of the meal the housekeeper, when she came to clear the table, brought a message saying that a gentleman wished to see Professor Arnold. Callers were so rare an event that Marion could not immediately hide her own agitation, and she overturned her glass, spilling the wine on the cloth.

Professor Arnold rose and left the room, and when he came back later, he said nothing of his guest, neither who he was nor why he had come there, and began to dictate slowly, from notes he had made during the day.

It grew unbearable for Marion to sit there in suspense, and more than once she missed her place and had to ask Professor Arnold to repeat himself. If he had noticed that her hand shook, he must certainly have noticed her abstraction, she felt, but whether or not, he remained silent.

All the next day she kept in the house, and though it was fine and sunny, she made a lame excuse and refused to walk with him in the garden. Instinctively she knew that he was watching her, but did not make the smallest effort to coerce her into any action, and so the week went by.

At the end of the week Marion rallied her courage, and walked in the garden with Professor Arnold. He was in a talkative mood again, and as they reached the door he took a letter from his pocket. "Will you be so kind as to put this in the letter box," he said, "as it will catch the evening post," and Marion took it, unable to refuse.

She went into the road through the gate, and on to the letter-box, just opposite to the house where Mrs. Nesbit lived; and with her eyes on the footpath, and her heart beating unmercifully fast, she hurried on, and having slipped the letter into the box, returned on flying feet.

"You need not have run," Professor Arnold said reprovingly. "Come now and take a turn with me on the terrace."

"May I ask," she said doubtfully, "who came to see you a few nights ago?"

"Certainly." Professor Arnold expressed no surprise. "It was no one more interesting than the librarian from Exeter, bringing me a note he had made at my request."

Marion sat down on a low stone seat, laughing rather wildly. "I believe my nerves are upset," she said. "I shall soon be all right again."

Professor Arnold stood before her and looked upwards. He was wrapped to the chin in a heavy coat. "I foretell snow," he said, "the sky has a haggard look, and the wind is getting out of control already. See, it is tearing up the river now, like a wild invisible thing at the

mercy of an insane impulse. If not to-night, to-morrow there will be snow."

Still nothing happened.

The Professor's forecast of snow proving a true one, Marion did not have to excuse herself for remaining indoors, and the following Monday, he told her that he was going to Exeter and might not be back until late. The idea of being left alone for the day did not trouble her ; it was more like being granted the gift of long hours during which she could think, as Eve may have thought in exile, of the fruit of the forbidden tree. The afternoon was clear, and intensely cold, and Marion put on a thick coat and wandered in the garden. Snow, half frozen on the evergreen of the hedges, and her own footprints made a solitary track across the white ground to the terrace ; she went to the further end, paused, and then turned back, and in doing so she came face to face with the fear which she had expected ever since she had seen Nesbit in the village. He was coming towards her, his eyes on her face, and his hands deep in his pockets.

"So here we are again," he said genially, catching her by the elbow, and walking along beside her. "Funny old place this world is. I might never have known if it hadn't been that my mother spotted you from the window as you were posting a letter. She said, 'There goes the girl who is supposed to be Professor Arnold's secretary.'"

Marion pulled herself away from his hold of

her. "I can only ask one thing of you," she said, "and that is, to leave me in peace." It was like being swept by a flood into a black cavern, and all her repulsion from him arose in her and cried aloud.

"Come now," he said, "I'm not going to ask you to marry me, again; no fear. I'm pretty fairly courageous, Marion, but I haven't nerve enough for that. Do you know what they all say about you in Rangoon?"

"How could I know?" she asked desperately.

"Why, that you shot poor old Suffy yourself and cleared out. I don't altogether blame you, as I think he wanted shooting—that is, if you did do it, but now that I find you tucked away, warm and safe, with a doddering old professor, it seems to me that is where I come in." He stood with his legs wide apart barring her path, as she turned her eyes to his face with a piteous, frozen stare.

"They say that *I* shot Suffy Rutherford?" she asked. "It's a lie."

"Maybe." He cocked his hat on one side and smiled at her. "Perhaps you're a moral murderer, not an actual one. You're prettier than ever, and the climate has suited you well. By Jove, when I saw you through the window, I nearly dropped. But I gave nothing away. I've been careful—one has to be careful in a dirty little hole like Exwater, and that is why I waited before coming to pay my respects."

Marion turned from him and leaned on the snow-covered balustrade. The grey afternoon

was fading into twilight, and a sunset like a narrow sword of brilliant orange smouldered behind the western hills.

"Don't pretend that you aren't glad to see me," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I'm better than your snuffy old professor, better than that fellow Dillon"; he tightened the grasp of his fingers. "We came back on the same boat, he and I, and I showed him what I thought of him."

Marion did not stir. So Quentin was back. The knowledge flooded over her and warmed her for a second, and then she remembered that if he were in England, it was never to her that he could come; but for a second, the announcement stunned her and she could not speak.

"Now, look here," Nesbit said argumentatively, "I'm not going to beat about the bush. If I choose to let things out about you, it'll be awkward for you in a place like this. I don't know, of course, how much your old fellow will stand, but I know that Exwater won't sit quiet. It's all a bit too highly flavoured, and already they talk about you."

"Please go away," she said, without turning.

"I can't do any comfortable courting under the windows of my mother's house," Nesbit continued, "and I don't intend to. While I am here, I must do as the damned what-you-may-call-'ems do, and mind my steps; but I shan't stay long; a day or two at most, and you must arrange to meet me in London."

As she said nothing he repeated the words.

"I'll give you a really good time," he said, "no end of a time, Marion."

At that she turned and spoke breathlessly. She was so angry that she could not find words, and when she spoke she quivered, standing in the icy cold of the evening, like a fire-tipped lance. "You are utterly shameless and beneath disdain," she said, beating back his hands from her. "You accused me, or said that others accused me, of having killed a man; if I could do so now, it would be true"; a long, shuddering sigh went up from her at the agonising force of her own furious passion of indignation.

"You have come here and trampled on decency and peace," she went on, "and you threaten me. Do what you like, say what suits you best, but go away."

He caught her hands, and she crushed back against the balustrade; it was an ugly moment as Nesbit held her by force and, bending back her neck, kissed her upturned face. And then the distant sound of the garden door opening and closing startled him and he let her go.

"Don't make an unholy fuss about nothing," he said, speaking rapidly, "I'll see you again."

Released from his grasp, Marion ran along the terrace and down the steps. She was trembling with anger and fear, and Professor Arnold laid his hand on her shoulder as she came to him.

"If you are in any trouble," he said kindly, "you must not hesitate to tell me of it"; he opened the door as he spoke and she went into

the dark hall. "I am one of those people who understand that *anything* can happen."

"I have seen some one who frightened me," she said, when they had reached the long room which was full of ghostly shadows. "He is here in Exwater, and I know now that I cannot stay any longer."

"Sit down and tell me," he said quietly.

"It is all a hopeless tangle," she went on, "but it appears, now, that I am accused of being the cause of a man's death."

"And this person who has forced himself upon you in my house has been threatening you?"

"I think that is what he meant." Marion's voice faltered.

"Put it all aside," Professor Arnold said quietly. "The wild years have to be lived through. You are in safety here with me." He looked at her, her face showing dim and white in the shadows. "May I ask if you cared at any time for this man?"

"Never," she said, her voice ringing clearly in the room.

"And you would rather not tell me who he is, or how he traced you?"

She considered for a moment. "I would rather not," she agreed.

"I do not wish to pry into your secrets," he said with infinite courtesy. "My judgments are never formed through what I hear from other people, so you can safely allow yourself to keep silence."

She got up and took his hand in hers and pressed it to her heart. Her gratitude went too deep for expression, but she thought in the troubled depths of her mind, that she was—even though so reluctantly—a disturber of the peace. She would drag the clamour of her own past into his solitude, and make for distraction in its ugly sense.

"I am a storm-centre," she said, with a pitiful little laugh. "Why is it, Professor Arnold?"

"How can I tell?" he returned the pressure of her hands. "It has probably something to say to the shape of your nose. You know the saying that if Cleopatra had squinted, the history of Egypt would have been a very different one."

She could only see the outline of his figure against the window, and could not read his face, but he had comforted her inexpressibly.

"Then, even if I am very troublesome, you will put up with me?" she asked.

"I will put up with you; and if this man appears again, he will have to deal with me," Professor Arnold said with a touch of unusual anger in his voice.

IT cost Quentin an effort to leave Rangoon, and put away as impossible all hope of finding Marion Keith. Where she was, he could not imagine, or how she had hidden herself so completely, and when he at last applied to the police, and every means at the disposal of Hall, the Chief Commissioner, had been tried in vain, Dillon was forced to give up his last hope, and made up his mind to return to England.

Always before this, he had, even when sorely disappointed, been able to provide himself with an alternative, but at last he was at the bottom of the bag. He loved Marion, not only with the passionate love of early manhood, but with something far more enduring and secure. She was his own ; there was nothing he did not understand in her, and even if he never saw her with his living eyes again, she would continue to be the throbbing centre of his life.

Sick, disappointed and hopeless, he made the arrangements for his return, and stood as the last faint outline of Rangoon died from sight, wondering whether he should still have remained there waiting on if a single hope were left. In his heart he called her name, with all the agony of an eternal parting, and in his memory it seemed to him that he was tragically

identified with everything which had gone wrong with her.

The damnable fiction that he was Dillon the forger, the man of vile morals and loose life, to which he had willingly lent himself, had turned her from him. With every justification she had refused to let him come near her, and in the reaction, had been driven to take the hand of friendship which the ill-fated Suffy had held out to her. The end of all that had been that Suffy had committed the weakling's act, and so flung confusion on all sides. He had left a curse upon Rosemary Villa, which Marion was forced to expiate, and it was believed by many that her hand had fired the shot. Suffy had gone off in a blaze of drama, but the fires he evoked consumed the innocent girl whom he had professed to love.

As he thought and thought of it all, Quentin became more convinced that Marion must have known of Suffy's death, and in the horror of it, had acted impetuously. The fact that she had fled away from Rosemary Villa was easy enough to understand, but beyond that an impenetrable blank covered every trace of her departure.

Quentin felt that he had been beaten, and his anxiety for Marion only grew with the passing of time. It was irritating to find that Nesbit was among the passengers, and though both men avoided one another, the exasperation was acute.

Once more the results of his hastily considered act was brought home to Dillon, when

Nesbit asked him, with sneering emphasis, whether he was likely to be received by his wife, and other interested people, on his arrival. Either he must tell Nesbit the whole story, and stoop to explaining things to a man he loathed, or let the brute chatter round the ship, pointing him out as the successful bluffer who had duped Rangoon. On the whole, Dillon preferred this to the other course of action, and his position on the ship was that of a celebrity with an exceptionally unpleasant record. He could not seek any solace in the bridge-room, as other men showed clearly that they would not play cards with him, and his hot, fiery temper had to be curbed and stifled every hour of the long days.

He was an outcast in the eyes of the people who sat around him, and talked of him in whispers ; a dog with a bad name, and a by-word in the East. The fact that none of them liked Nesbit made no difference, and he even gained a little popularity when he began to tell his fellow voyagers all the very unseemly details of Dillon's raffish past.

And yet he looked so different to what might be expected, that one or two of the women ranged themselves on his side and fought his battles.

" He always specialised in women," Nesbit said with a laugh, " and can fool them to any extent."

It is never pleasant to be entirely isolated, unless one is a saint or a reformer, and Quentin

was neither. He was being "put through it" because he had been a fool, and admitted his kinship to Suffy Rutherford in this respect; yet it made nothing easier, and even the most stoically minded man alive does not care to be scorned by people whom he regards as his inferiors.

He left the ship at Marseilles without a single good-bye; even ignoring the sentimental young lady who wore her heart on her sleeve and was in love with him in spite of his sins, and an exotic-looking grass-widow, who had added to his wretchedness by the heat of her pursuit, which had first taken the form of offers of cigarettes, and during the progress through the Red Sea had become proportionately fervid.

London had nothing to offer him. He avoided his club and went to Dawn to see his mother.

"Well?" she asked, looking up at him from her chair by the fire, "You are out of the groove, Quentin."

"I have only exchanged it," he said. He did look altered, she told herself, as he stood there with his hands in his pockets and his dark hair shining in the sunlight which streamed through the window. "In fact, mother, I got into some one else's groove instead, and it was abominably uncomfortable. He has a wife and had been anything but particular in the past."

"You haven't undertaken his liabilities?" she asked with her wonderful smile. Since he

was a baby she was never sure when he was joking or serious.

"No, not as bad as that," he said, "and, now, I honestly don't know what to do next."

"Sandra is engaged," Mrs. Dillon said, watching his face carefully. "She is going to marry Clarence Wilde. I hear that he is a very good young man."

"I am glad," he replied, staring before him. The news had come with a slight sense of shock. Sandra had always been there, before, and now her departure would leave a gap.

"And did you not find anyone?" his mother asked, a look of anxiety troubling her face.

"I did a much worse thing," he said, sitting down in a low chair beside her; "I lost some one, and try as I will I can't find her again."

Mrs. Dillon touched his sleeve with her long fingers, and said nothing. If Quentin wished to tell her his secrets, she was ready to listen, but not for anything would she intrude upon his reserve, but the look of distress in her son's eyes lay there like a shadow. His lips were slightly parted, his eyes deep with thought, and his face absorbed. Just then he was lost in his dream, and she knew it to be a tragic one.

"I expect we shall be alone, mother," he said, "you and I, to the end of things."

"Did she not care?"

"I think she did. Sometimes I was sure of it, but she went away, and no one knows where she went to."

Bit by bit the story was told, as the shadows

crept up slowly and the pleasant room grew dark.

"Quentin, what a mad thing to do," she said at last. "It is bad enough to be responsible for one's self and one's young mistakes when one grows older, but to undertake to *be* some one else is really beyond everything. . . . I pity the girl from my heart."

"I always was a scape-goat," Quentin laughed. "I have been held responsible for my friends' sins since I could speak. Don't you remember, mother, when I was a little boy with a love for getting myself into every kind of mess, I was blamed if Clarence Wilde had a dirty face. It wasn't his fault, it was my bad influence; and that has been the way of it ever since. When Forrester went a mucker at my crammer's, I was told off, though I had nothing to say to it; and all along I have stood the racket and got the kicks. It hardly seemed to make anything worse to pretend that I was out and out Esau, but I admit that it wasn't a very sensible thing to do." He stopped and kissed her. "Every one, so I'm told, has to suffer in this world, and I'm not going to make a fuss."

"And the girl, that poor, forsaken child? Where can she be?" Mrs. Dillon's voice was charged with deep feeling.

"If I could only tell you," he said in a low voice; and then he walked to the window and began to whistle a rag-time.

He stayed on at Dawn through the winter,

and with the spring his old restlessness returned upon him and drove him up to London. It offered him very little in the way of alleviation from his thoughts, but he was uncertain as to where he wished to be. A dryness of heart had come over him, and all places were much the same. One day, as he walked down Regent Street, he was surprised to see Nesbit coming towards him, and would have passed him by without recognition had it not been that the proprietor of the Palm Hotel stopped full in his path, and looked at him with studied insolence.

"Hallo, Dillon," he said, "so you aren't in Dartmoor."

"Drop that lie," Quentin said sharply. His nerves were on edge, and he could not be sure of his temper.

"It was your own lie, anyhow," Nesbit said more amiably. "I only heard lately that you'd bluffed us, as well as the rest of Rangoon. I can't think why you did, but it's got nothing to say to me."

"Nothing at all," Dillon agreed, and would have passed onwards only that Nesbit caught him by the arm.

"I've a bit of pleasant news for you," he said in a voice which sounded like the jab of a knife. "That sly little cat, Marion Keith, is living at Exwater with an old professor, and the place rings with it. Pretty audacious, I call it, in an English village. I went there, but got no thanks, so I'd not advise you to

call" ; he laughed as Dillon's face flared up hotly.

" You have always been a liar," he said, " and now you are telling an exceptionally dirty lie."

" Oh, I was consolable," Nesbit said as he turned away. " I gave her the first offer, and as she was fixed up, I didn't go lonely."

Dillon looked at him as he mingled in the crowd, and his thoughts surged madly. Ill-conditioned as the messenger had been, the message was wildly and fiercely sweet. Marion Keith was not only alive, but in England, and as for the story of the professor, Quentin did not even give it a thought.

He went back to his club and took down a railway guide, looking up the trains to Exwater. The country was in its early spring beauty, with feathery green larches flinging their plumes in the air and golden furze in blossom, and through the April gala of the land he was setting out to find Marion and bring her all the pent-up love of his longing heart. With a violent impetuosity he caught the train at Paddington and left London behind him, leaning back in a carriage with time to think, at last.

All his riotous longing for new adventure had left him suddenly ; he wanted, only, something he had lost. Marion stood to him for the lasting haven of happiness, and alone could give him the precious sense of rest. Bright clouds drifted over the blue, and here and there he

had a glimpse of the golden vision of the brooding spirit of nature. These beautiful glimpses passed and vanished even while he did not notice them definitely. Everything was steeped in wonder and delight, for she who had been dead to him was alive, was lost and found again.

It was characteristic of Dillon not to pause for a second to ask what greeting Marion Keith would give him. Spring time was over the world, and she was part of the uprising life and splendour of the season ; she would take all that he had to give her, and they would fulfil the promise of the living springtide in her heart and his. His new adventure was full of sweet, restless seeking, wholly different from all other outgoings that he had known, and he thought of how he would draw her into his arms, and they would stand lips to lips. Destiny had led them along such hard, barren paths, and division had thwarted them, but now, at last, there would be an end to all that. He had crossed the gulf of the hours, and called her to him in actual companionship. She would come to him, would she not ? Come to him in some beautiful green glade in the woods, or under the rose-red cliffs which stood up vividly from the blue sea. It must all take place between them, this great reunion, somewhere full of fitting beauty. Perhaps they would meet that very night when the moon was rising and throwing long silver arrows through the deep darkness of the fir trees. Quentin held his breath, and his heart beat violently, as he

knew to the full all the age-old wonder of chivalry and passion. Marion, who was so simple and so young, so defenceless and yet full of courage. How wide of its mark the lie which Nesbit had thrown at her had been.

Then, there would be so much to tell. He had his story, with its boyish folly, to confess, and she must have as much to say in return. Her flight from Rosemary Villa ; where she had been ever since ; how it was that she had come to Devonshire and discovered a professor to work for. It would be like the meeting of two lovers who had died and met again on the green hills somewhere in Eternity, and were able to recall the strange adventures of Time.

The slow hours of the journey did not drag, as he let his mind go out towards the future, and when at length he got to Exeter and changed into the little train which was to bring him to Exwater, he might have looked to all outward appearance a rather unusually well-dressed and composed young man, but at heart he was robed in the very colours of sunset which dyed the land in their gorgeous tints.

PROFESSOR ARNOLD felt the warmth of the April sunlight as he stood on his balcony looking over the shine and ripple of the quiet river, and out to the hazy horizon of the far away sea. He had been thinking of his book rather than of his diligent secretary, and when he came back into the work-room he spoke to Marion, leaning over her chair.

" You must go out and 'greet the sun,'" he said, patting her shoulder. " I can't have you growing old before your time."

Marion looked up. Her face was paler than it had been, and she had lost some of her round youthfulness during the long winter. " Must I go out ? " she asked. " Not farther than the garden ? " She shook her head, " I can't, Professor. I'm dreadfully cowardly, I suppose, but ever since people have been so cruel I hate having to face them."

" People are always cruel," he said, " little people. For some reason or other they prefer to believe the worst they can of their neighbours. Don't take it to heart too much."

Marion brushed her hair back from her forehead. She recalled a meeting with Mrs. Nesbit in the sunny road outside the Green Gate, and how Nesbit, who was with his mother,

had stopped and spoken to her, the only time she had seen him again ; she remembered Mrs. Nesbit's look of withering contempt, followed by a vulgar attack in words which Marion had never forgotten. The onslaught had been outrageous, and left a scar behind it, but it was not all. Rumours had come to her, and Cecily Gordon, the daughter of the Rector of Exwater, who had an extravagant girl's friendship for her, had, without warning, cut Marion dead. Not that she blamed Cecily, who only acted under orders, but the sense of being regarded as a social leper brought its inevitable pain.

She knew that more than one of the residents had written or spoken to Professor Arnold about his secretary, and even then, she did not know half what was believed against her. The professor had done his best to protect her from the sharp arrows of local slander, and at length the majority of the people in the village began to accuse him of having his own reasons for keeping Miss Keith in his employment. They asked each other why, since he was a bachelor, he did not marry Miss Keith and silence the tongues of the gossips ; and the forty years which divided them in age was not considered any excuse.

Memory lives very long in country places, and as there was nothing else for them to talk of which was at all as interesting, the scandal grew. Nesbit had retaliated upon Marion by telling his mother that she had left a fine record behind her in the East, and had to escape out

of Rangoon. There was the tragic accident in the garden of Rosemary Villa, a queer story about her and Dillon, which he had invented himself, and the undeniable fact that Marion had run away and remained in hiding for some time. All these things added together, and combined with the fact that she was now secretary to Professor Arnold, and that he was unmarried, were accepted as the most conclusive evidence against her.

"I know we ought not to mind," she said.

"Tell me," he asked her, "did the man who came to see you that day, ever attempt to force himself upon you again, or trouble you with letters?"

Marion shook her head. She had not been able to bring herself to mention Nesbit to Professor Arnold, and even the hateful occasion when she met him and his mother had not been spoken of by her. Silence was the only possible means she had of protecting her own self-respect. The Nesbits had been the authors of the worst accusations against her, and whether Professor Arnold knew that Mrs. Nesbit's son and the man who came to see her in the garden were one and the same, she could not tell. He never spoke to her of the trouble outside the gates, and it was his habit to remind her that "human matters, one and all, are not worthy of great seriousness—nevertheless. . . ."

"Do not give these things a thought," he said kindly. "I once quoted Nietzsche to you before, and I do so again. 'However you

may be situated, serve yourself as a source of experience.' It is a wise man's doctrine, and now, put on your hat," he looked out at the gay day beyond the windows, "Nature ignores the chatterers, and the sun is just as warm as if they did not exist."

"I suppose it is," she said, laughing a sad little laugh. "If only one could forget that they exist; find a door out of it all. I could be so happy here with you if they would only leave me alone."

"Which is exactly what you will never induce them to do, if you happen to be the type of individual who excites their envy."

"Envy?" she got up, "who could feel any envy towards me, I wonder?"

"The gods gave you golden hair," he said, smiling, "and you know that when the wren was given a glittering crown, the other birds persecuted him and tried to kill him, and men also tried to kill him, so that Jupiter was kind enough to change the gold into feathers. It may have something to say to your hair, young lady."

"I shall dye it black," she replied, and her laugh was steadier, "if that is the reason."

"You reap the advantage of being a bird of strange plumage," he said, sitting down at the table, "and now go out, and fly up into the skies and find your songs again."

She waved her hand to him from the door. Professor Arnold had the gift of consolation, which is a very great one, and he had made her

happier. “ ‘ Human matters, one and all—well, so be it,’ ” she said to herself, “ why should I care ? ”

Professor Arnold worked steadily for half an hour, and at the end of that time a knock came to his door, and his housekeeper opened it.

“ There is a gentleman downstairs,” she said, “ who wishes to see Miss Keith.”

The professor collected his thoughts and looked up. “ Miss Keith has gone out,” he said, and then he stood up suddenly. “ Will you ask this gentleman what he wants with Miss Keith, and kindly send up his name.”

After a few moments’ delay, the housekeeper returned. “ He is a Mr. Dillon, and knew Miss Keith in Rangoon,” she said.

“ Then show him up,” Professor Arnold said, standing by the fire-place.

He had formed his own conclusions as to what manner of man the individual who had come to disturb the peace once more would probably be, and he looked at Dillon with his pebble-like eyes and watched him closely. This was not what he had expected, and he studied him carefully. There was something about Quentin which took the imagination as well as the eyes, and he was irritated to find that the clear, open look of the blackguard made a claim to his sympathy. It was not only his good looks which attracted the professor, it was something else as well. You could tell on sight that Dillon

had the exquisite gift of fidelity. And yet, how could that be so?

"Sit down, Mr. Dillon," he said, without any further welcome. "I should like to know your reason for wishing to see my secretary, Miss Keith, if it is agreeable to you."

Dillon sat down. "I should like to tell it to you," he said. "I came here to ask her if she would marry me."

"Then I can answer you at once. She will not."

Quentin leaned his arms on the table. "With all respect to you, Professor Arnold, I must hear her say so myself."

"You will admit, I think," Professor Arnold said with great politeness, "that you have given that young lady a great deal of unnecessary pain. You made it impossible for her to remain in Rangoon, and now you come here, to bring fresh trouble upon her."

Dillon drew a quick breath. "I hope that her decision to leave Rosemary Villa had nothing to do with me," he said. "There are things which I must explain to her, and to you also, if you will listen."

"I cannot see that any good object will be arrived at if I do listen," the professor said. Answering rather querulously, "I am a busy man. I know that you have alarmed her already, and I intend to protect her from further annoyance."

"But even a criminal is allowed to state his case," Dillon objected. "Give me that much grace, in common justice."

"Justice is never common," Professor Arnold said, meditatively. "However, since you make that appeal, I will listen to you." He looked at Quentin again, and wondered how it was that he could appear to be so straightforward, and yet cover up such depths of deceit. On the whole, the young man was certainly dangerous.

Dillon clasped his hands on the table and began to speak. "I want to cut the story as short as I can," he said, "without leaving out any of the important points."

"A thoroughly competent liar," the professor reflected. "I must certainly prevent any meeting between him and Marion."

Dillon talked on rapidly. He spoke of himself as a man who had all his life acted on impulse, and the maddest whim of all had been his undertaking to impersonate another man, of whom he knew absolutely nothing. The professor's face hardened, and as he went on with his story, a sense of helplessness gained upon Dillon. How could he expect to persuade a man whose whole life was under the iron yoke of scientific fact, to accept the wildly improbable facts of the case?

"And you discovered, I understand, that this person, whose name you had adopted for the purpose of masquerade, was married?"

"Yes," Quentin said, moving restlessly. "How was I to know that? In fact, he told me he was not."

"Miss Keith was informed of the past record of the person whom you tell me is not you?"

"I am sure that she was. But I also think that she liked me—as a friend, if nothing else."

Professor Arnold shook his head. "Your account is entirely unsatisfactory," he said, "and I may as well put an end to your feeling of suspense. Miss Keith told me that if you appeared here, she did not intend to see you, Mr. Dillon, and that she wished to be allowed to continue her life quietly. It would be only distressing to her to meet you, and I ask you, most sincerely, to spare her the pain of an interview. All that you say may be true. She never alluded to it; and, on an occasion which you will doubtless recall, she must have made her feelings quite clear."

Quentin frowned thoughtfully. "She did not know how things really were," he said. "I had no chance to explain."

What a pity it all was, Professor Arnold reflected, but he did not express his thoughts. He must get rid of this urgent young man. Marion must be spared his ardour and the terrible impetuosity of his demand.

"But you cannot refuse to let me see her," Quentin said. "I don't ask to see her alone, Professor Arnold. Let her come here and I will speak to her with you in the room. Don't stand between us. I've been looking for her so long."

Professor Arnold paced the room, his eyes on the floor. It was easier to think coherently if one did not look at Dillon. Youth had such a desperate appeal, and the young man disturbed

him. He could not accept the story without sifting the evidence, and as Dillon had been, from his own account, capable of deception, how could he tell that the explanation was not all of a piece with the rest ?

" Will you give me your word to make no attempt to see Miss Keith until I have proof, in the first place, that you are the man you now profess to be, and in the second, that your visit to her would be acceptable," he said, standing by the table. " She has suffered, most unjustly, and I wish to protect her from further annoyance. On my part, I will promise you to verify your credentials without delay, and if Miss Keith feels equal to seeing you, I will let you know. Have I your promise ? "

Dillon hesitated for a second, and then got up, and held out his hand. " I think that is common justice," he said quietly, " and I will give you my word."

ALL the afternoon Marion worked at the table with Professor Arnold, and, since the secrecy of things is inviolable, did not know that Quentin had been sitting in the same chair, and that his arms had leaned heavily on the blotting paper before her.

She had been refreshed by her walk, and her eyes looked brighter, so that Professor Arnold nodded appreciatingly and, fearing to disturb her, held his peace. It was only at the end of the day's work that he put down his pen and cleared his throat.

"Before you went out to-day," he said, "I asked you about that young man who had already been a cause of so much trouble to you in your life."

Marion winced and put her hands over her face. "I think I would rather not speak of him," she said.

"Usually," Professor Arnold went on, "I am in the habit of considering myself a good judge of character, but I admit myself at fault—at fault. He is attractive in appearance."

She conjured up a memory of Nesbit's overblown comeliness and coarsely handsome face. "Some people might think so," she said, "but how do you know?" she rose quickly from

her chair and went round the table to where he sat. "He hasn't *been* here ; don't tell me that, please don't."

"He has been here," the professor said, "but I told him that you would not see him."

"I cannot," she spoke violently, "when I do, I feel that I could kill either myself or him. Oh, don't let him come back."

"There, there," he patted her shoulders as she crouched by his chair. "I tell you that he will not trouble you. He gave me his word."

"His word!" Marion threw back her head and laughed. "What is that worth? Everything he says is a lie. I know he will come back, and in the end there will be nothing for it but for me to go away from you, and hide myself somewhere."

Professor Arnold cleaned his glasses with his white silk handkerchief. "In spite of all you say, I must admit that he impressed me favourably," he said. "There is something attractive there, beyond mere good looks, and I return to it—he impressed me favourably."

Marion rose from her knees and went moodily to the window. There was evidently no mercy anywhere, and she thought of Quentin Dillon, her heart strained with anguish and distress.

"This story of his having personated some one else, is admittedly, a very wild one," the professor went on; "I see how ill-judged and inexcusable it is, but at the same time he made it evident that he was acting as he did chiefly because of you. Let us be just to him."

"What story?" she said disdainfully. "I know nothing about it, except perhaps that he usually insisted that he was better than he appeared to be. How could you believe in him?"

"Ah, that is just the point," Professor Arnold replied. "I did believe. It went against my own clear judgment, and made me seem quite foolish to myself. He was mixed up with people whom one might describe as his partners in crime, but he was not of them. He was altogether different. Do not let us divest him of any saving grace which there may be in the tangle. I think he believes in himself, though he may only be having some half-conscious dodge to escape from self-judgment."

Marion said nothing, but her eyes were contemptuous. For the first time her faith in Professor Arnold faltered.

"He admitted, to use his own words," Professor Arnold went on, "that he had made a confounded fool of himself. The penalty was a hard one; give him that concession."

"You actually *believe* in him," she said slowly, and Professor Arnold flushed and said nothing.

"I am not minimising the fact that he behaved very badly," he said lamely. "I declined to let him see you, even though he suggested that I should be present at the interview, and I told him that you would not marry him."

Once again Marion laughed. "When I last saw him," she said, "down there in the garden,

he told me that he did not intend to offer to marry me, again, and he hinted . . ." she turned away. " He said abominable things of you to me, if you must know it."

Professor Arnold got up suddenly. " He said . . . Do you know what you are saying? Mr. Dillon said something insulting of you?"

She turned back, and in a second the change which had come over her was so astonishing that Professor Arnold had difficulty in believing his own senses.

" Mr. Dillon," she ran to him and caught him by the arm. " You did not tell me, you did not say that you were speaking of him. Are you *sure*?"

" But this is ridiculous," he said irritably. " I have been speaking of him all the time."

" And he was here? He came to find me? And the story of his being some one else—oh, please tell me it all from the beginning."

" If you will give me a moment in which I can speak coherently," Professor Arnold put out protesting hands, " Mr. Dillon, whom I believed to be the man you wished strictly to avoid, came here, and I told him that you would not see him. He made me a long explanation, and, eventually, giving me his word of honour not to attempt to see you, left the house."

She was leaning against the mantelpiece, her face transfigured and her eyes on fire, and Professor Arnold got up and took a paper from a drawer. " Here is his mother's address, which he left for me, so that she should corroborate

his story, but it appears to me that you will form your own conclusions without reference to her."

"Where is he now?" Marion asked, and her voice was hardly audible.

Quentin was sitting in the dark coffee-room of the small hotel in the High Street of Exwater. It was not a cheerful place at the best of times, and he felt hopelessly depressed and baffled. He was in the same place with Marion, and at the hour of his attainment Professor Arnold had banged a door between them, and shut her away from him. He had deliberately made it impossible for him to go and seek her and get his answer direct from her, and like all quick and impulsive natures Quentin suffered from the violence of reaction.

Lost in his trouble of mind, and prepared to go away once more, to wait until the professor wrote to him, Dillon sat with his hands deep in his pockets savagely angry with his fate. It was all his own doing, but that did not improve matters in the least. The professor, taking upon himself the rôle of the warder of the gates, had a sword in his hand and stood between Dillon and his heart's desire.

It was upon this absorption that a messenger came to him, carrying a letter, which Dillon took impatiently, and tearing the envelope open, he read the lines. "Please come to the house as soon as you conveniently can," and signed by Professor Arnold.

He felt as though he had suddenly stepped on to firm ground, from a morass, and, snatching up his hat, he hurried along the street and found his way to the Green Gate.

The garden, with its suggestion of having waited for some one to come and something to happen there, greeted him with the mingled scent of early lilac blossoms and French honeysuckle, and for a second he stood undecided whether to go into the house or not. And then he saw Professor Arnold coming towards him.

" You will find Miss Keith on the terrace walk," he said, and Dillon did not wait for anything further.

There she stood, the sunlight on her hair, and her eyes holding his, as he came to her and took her hands.

" Marion ! " He drew her into the shelter of the yew hedge and caught her in his arms.

It was not the cry of his first love for her, but the mingled intensity of first love and last, and she buried her face on his breast.

" Oh, how long it has all been," she said.

" How long, Quentin."

" And you love me ? " he asked.

" I have known from the beginning that either you must love me or I should die," she said with a sobbing laugh. " I have tried everything I could to make myself forget—and nothing was any use " ; she drew away a little, holding him fiercely with her small hands.

" Even when I believed that you were married,

and that you were a most disreputable person, Quentin, I went on caring."

" You are a wicked woman," he kissed her as he spoke, " but it is a comfort to think that you are."

" I have felt dead to everything," she hid her face again on his shoulder. " Ah ! How did I ever bear the agony of tearing myself away from you."

He drew her to a seat, and they sat together hand in hand. She tried to tell him what had happened that night at Rosemary Villa. But conversation was not easy, for it had to rush forward to the future, even while they spoke of the past, and the deep abyss of misery was now put behind them both, though the darkness of it all was still close enough to make the glory more splendid to their eyes.

Spring was around them with its unfolding promise of flowers and leaves, and it was as though it had come into perfect manifestation in their own hearts, laying tender hands upon two lovers, so that they forgot everything in one long kiss, while the sunset flamed and died, and the darkness began to fall. Lifting up her face in his hands Quentin raised his own eyes to the sky and the words which had once been so hopeless came back to him with a new meaning :

" Another night, by Allah's will."

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